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EXODUS
I
CHAP XX.

Thou shalt have none other gods but me.
II
Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image nor the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above or in the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down to them nor worship them for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God and visit the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me and shew mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.
III
Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain for the Lord will that taketh his name in vain.
IV
Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day Six days shall thou labour and do all that thou hast to do but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God in it thou shalt not do any manner of work thou and thy son and thy daughter thy man servant and thy maid the stranger that is within thy gates for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth the sea and all that is in them and rested the seventh day wherefore the Lord blessed the seventh day and hallowed it.
V
Honour thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.
VI
Thou shalt do no murder.
VII
Thou shalt not commit adultery.
VIII
Thou shalt not steal.
IX
Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.
X
Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house thy neighbour's wife nor his servant nor his maid nor his ox nor his ass nor any thing that is his.



TEN COMMANDMENTS.

THE LIFE
OF
OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR
JESUS CHRIST:

TOGETHER WITH THE
LIVES OF HIS HOLY APOSTLES AND EVANGELISTS.

BY
BY THE REV. JOHN FLEETWOOD, D.D.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,
EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY;
BY P. DODDRIDGE, D.D.

THE GOLDEN GROVE;
A CHOICE MANUAL OF WHAT IS TO BE BELIEVED, PRACTISED, AND DESIRED OR
PRAYED FOR;
BY JEREMY TAYLOR.

MEDITATIONS UPON THE LORD'S PRAYER;
BY SIR MATTHEW HALE.

AND
SERMONS ON THE DEATH AND ASCENSION OF CHRIST;
BY THE REV. HUGH BLAIR, D.D., F.R.S.

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Author's Preface.

THE first and greatest object that should most materially engage the attention of mankind is, the pursuit of that knowledge which tends to promote their welfare while on this transitory stage of life, and their eternal happiness in that which is to come. No measures whatever can be taken to effect this, but the most earnest endeavours to make themselves perfectly acquainted with, and strictly to follow the example of, our Blessed Redeemer, the Great Captain of our sufferings—the preserver of our souls from death to life everlasting—the grand pattern of sanctity, humility, meekness, and charity—the King of Glory—the guiding star to righteousness—and who, as he himself expresses it, “is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”

As, therefore, in our Blessed Redeemer only rests the whole of our eternal Salvation, let HIM only engross our most serious attention: and let the example of his Holy Apostles inspire us with resolution to make us emulous to be accounted voluntary servants of Christ, who condescended to suffer an ignominious and painful death, to clear us from our sins, and the punishment due to our manifold transgressions.

In seriously perusing the Life and Transactions of the Great Redeemer of Mankind, we shall there find those balmy sweets, those solid comforts, which will promote our felicity here, and secure to us eternal happiness hereafter. Our Blessed Lord tells us, that if we are poor in spirit, we shall gain the kingdom of Heaven—if we mourn here, we shall be comforted—if we hunger and thirst after righteousness, we shall be filled

It is from these assurances that St. Augustine says, “The happiness of this life consists in the Holy Ghost, without which we cannot come to the knowledge of God.” All true knowledge, virtue, and perfection that a Christian can desire, or attain to, are contained in the Doctrines and Transactions of our Glorious Redeemer; who teaches us, that righteousness and holiness consist in the inward purity and integrity of the mind, not in the outward show of works—in a conscience void of offence, not in the pompous applause of men—in humility, not in ostentation—in contempt, not in pursuit, of wordly honours—and he farther teaches us to love our enemies as well as our friends. Here we read of the nature of true faith; of trusting in Christ alone; and how we ought not to glory, but in HIM. Here we also read of the certainty of salvation—the forgiveness of sins—the resurrection of the body, and of life eternal.

We most sincerely hope that the perusal of this Work will produce that effect for which it is so happily adapted, namely, the promotion of the cause of Christianity, and making mankind wise unto salvation. Serious attention to the Divine transactions contained in this history, will fill the mind with awful, though pleasing thoughts, banish every doubt, confirm the reader in the most sublime truths, and fill his soul with Divine ecstasies.

We shall only further observe, that in the execution of this pious Work, we have endeavoured to improve the understanding and warm the heart; to inspire the mind with gratitude for the astonishing love of a dying Saviour; and to excite the soul to embrace his kind invitations of forgiveness, of happiness, and of peace.

Introduction.

WHAT Christian can hear of the Life of the Saviour without feeling in his bosom the warm glow of gratitude and admiration ?

If, in connection with art, the painter would have a noble model placed before his eyes, how infinitely more desirable is it, that the sojourner here, who seeks consolation for the troubles of life in the prospect of a blessed immortality, should have constantly in his view the bright example set by Jesus Christ on earth. To be enabled to trace his career is a privilege which cannot be overvalued. Elisha, when he saw Elijah pass from earth to heaven, might rejoice with holy transport in the glory of his friend ; but it was not given to him to follow by the same means to the seer's celestial destination. Happier than Elisha, the sincere followers of the Redeemer, marking his glorious passage, find in his history all that is wanting to enable them to reach that "house in which there are many mansions," and that presence in which "there is fulness of joy and blessings for evermore."

The patriot and philanthropist cannot but deplore that the principles he inculcated have not been more generally acted upon by the rulers of nations. Had the Sermon on the Mount been duly attended to, the mournful discord which has spread desolation far and wide would have been speedily checked, and ambition would have found a better path to glory, and princes aspiring to be "peace-makers," would have become children of God, by rendering themselves the benefactors of men.

The lights of Christianity are not necessary to secure admiration, for the bold and enlightened reformer Jesus, "who went about doing good," who fearlessly attacked vice and superstition, who relieved affliction, and who in his own person endured the bitterest insults and the keenest

pangs that ingenious cruelty could inflict, with unfailing resignation to the will of the Almighty.

Even the heathen, the infidel, must admire a character so beneficent, so pure. What an example of humility and benevolence did he set! He avoided not the poor nor the ignorant, nor even those whose proved offences against society would have moved a worldly-minded being only to notice with a view to punish. He cheered the desponding outcast; he hailed the tear of contrition; and, proclaiming that there was great joy in heaven when a sinner turned from his evil ways, he taught the humble penitent to hope that the laboured prayer of the self-satisfied Pharisee would be less regarded at the throne of grace than the Publican's simple but earnest appeal, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Those who have sighed in hopeless gloom, whom an oppressed conscience has driven nearly to despair, are consoled by him. They hear him call

Sinners wrung with true repentance,
Doom'd for guilt to endless pains;
Justice now revokes the sentence,
Mercy calls you,—break your chains.

In the career of the illustrious Pilgrim we find all that ambitious piety would wish to imitate. Lessons of wisdom, bright, touching, endearing, fall from his lips. We are warned of danger; we are taught to scorn wretched superstition, and to love mercy. Were our views confined to this obviously imperfect state of being, the earthly career of Jesus might be traced with profit. Not a word need be added of its surpassing value in regard to the momentous hereafter.



The Life

OF

OUR BLESSED LORD AND SAVIOUR

JESUS CHRIST.

CHAPTER I.

Presage of the Birth of Christ.—Prediction of the Birth of John the Baptist—Salutation of the Blessed Virgin by the Angel—Visitation of the Virgin Mary to Elizabeth—Birth of the Baptist.

NO event that ever did, or perhaps will, happen, can more remarkably display the wisdom and power of the GREAT JEHOVAH, than the glorious manner in which he brought life and immortality to light, by the gospel of his only Son manifested in the flesh.

History, as it refers merely to human events, is a pleasing and instructing subject ; but that which relates to our immortal interest, certainly claims our most serious regard.

The mind of man cannot be more delightfully employed than in the contemplation of the wisdom and goodness of the Creator of the universe, who, by means the least thought of and imagined, confirmed

and established that glorious Gospel, which points out the only foundation of a sinner's hopes of eternal salvation. Notwithstanding the strength and number of its enemies, the Church grew from the most inconsiderable beginnings, to an immense fabric or building in the Lord ; nor shall the united efforts of earth and hell be able to prevail against it. As it was planted, so it was reared, by an almighty hand, which, like the careful husbandman, pruned and cultivated each tender sprig, till it arrived at full perfection ; or, to use the words of our blessed Lord, "The least of all seeds grew up and waxed a great tree, and spread out its branches and filled the earth."

Thus prevailed eternal truth : nor

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

could the inveterate Jews, or superstitious Heathens, resist its progress, though Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and people of Israel, “gathered themselves together against the Lord, and against his Anointed:” for the doctrine of God confounded the wisdom of the one, and overcame the folly of the other.

If we survey the stupendous works of creation, we shall find that few arrived at perfection at once. This observation is amply confirmed by the various productions in the natural, and changes in the moral world. The Supreme Being, who conducts all his operations according to his infinite wisdom, appears to have retained the same maxim in regulating his kindest dispensations to the sons of men. The divine will was not revealed, at first, in its clearest evidence and fullest splendour; the dawn, in a spiritual as well as in a natural sense, preceded the meridian glory. The former revelation was but a type or earnest of the latter, and in comparison with it, intricate and mysterious.

The all-gracious God, as it seemed best to his unerring wisdom, was pleased, by degrees, to open and unfold his glorious counsels; and man, by degrees, attained to the knowledge of the great plan of salvation, and the means used by its

great Author to promote and establish it.

Some time before the incarnation of the blessed Jesus, an opinion prevailed among the pious part of the Jews, that the great Jehovah would condescend to favour them with a clear revelation of his divine will, by the mission of some eminent person, qualified from above to instruct them in the same. This opinion was founded on the predictions of the ancient prophets, who had described, with the utmost beauty and clearness, the person, character, and glory, of the Messiah appointed by God, in his own time, to declare his eternal counsels to mankind.

Relying on the fulfilment of these prophecies, the devout persons among the Jews imagined the time appointed by God near at hand, and that the promised Messiah would shortly make his appearance, and therefore are said to have “waited night and day for the consolation of Israel.” These people, at that time grievously oppressed by the Roman power, and consequently anxious of regaining their liberty, as well as revenging themselves on their tyrannical oppressors, waited the accomplishment of the prophecies with the most solicitous desire. But this opinion of the approach of a general Deliverer extended much farther than the country of the





St. John.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Jews: for, through their connections with so many countries, their disputes with the learned men among the Heathens, and the translation of the Old Testament into a language now almost general, their religion greatly prevailed in the East, and consequently their opinion that a Prince would appear in the kingdom of Judea, who would dispel the mists of ignorance, deliver the Jews from the Roman yoke, and spread his dominion from one end of the world to the other.

While the eastern world was fraught with these sanguine hopes, the angel Gabriel (who had appeared to Daniel the prophet, with certain information as to the period of the Messiah's coming, as well as his transactions in this lower world,) was sent to Zacharias, a pious priest, while he was executing his office before God, in the order of his course, (which was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord,) to foretell that a child should spring from him and his wife Elizabeth, (though they were stricken in years,) who should be endowed with extraordinary gifts from Heaven, and honoured with being the forerunner of the Saviour of the world.

Zacharias, when he saw the angel, though he probably knew him to be of heavenly extraction, could not

judge the subject of his mission, and therefore discovered a mixture of fear and surprise; but the heavenly ambassador cheered his desponding soul with this kind address: "Fear not, Zacharias, for thy prayer is heard, and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John." That he waited day and night for the consolation of Israel, he well knew; which is all we can understand by his prayer being heard; for it was unnatural for him to think that he and his wife Elizabeth, who were advanced in years, should have a son; nay, he intimates his doubt concerning it in these words: "Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man and my wife well stricken in years." Besides, he was a priest of the course of Abia, whose particular office was to pray, in behalf of the people, for public and national blessings; so that it is very reasonable to think, that on all occasions of public worship, he prayed most earnestly for the accomplishment of the prophecies relative to the appearance of the long-expected Messiah, who was promised as a general blessing to all the nations of the earth.

That this was the great subject of his prayer, appears from the declaration of Gabriel: The prayer thou hast directed with sincerity to an

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Almighty ear, concerning the coming of the Messiah, "is heard; and, behold, thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son," who shall prepare the way for the mighty Redeemer of Israel. The good old priest was as much astonished at the subject of the mission, as he was at the appearance of the messenger; and esteeming it impossible that his wife, thus advanced in years, should conceive a son, weakly demanded a sign, to confirm his belief in the fulfilment of the promise, though he knew the authority of the angel was derived from the God of truth. But as it is the lot of humanity to err, Zacharias had, for that time, forgot that nothing was impossible to Omnipotence, as well as that it was not the first time the aged were caused to conceive, and bear children. The least reflection would have reminded him, that Sarah conceived and bore Isaac, when she was far advanced in years; and that Samuel was born of a woman, who had been long reputed, and even called, *barren*.

His curiosity was, indeed, gratified, but in a manner that carried with it, at once, a confirmation of the promise, and a punishment of his unbelief. As he had verbally testified his doubt of the fulfilment of the prediction of the angel, he was punished with the loss of his

speech, which was to continue to the very day in which the prediction should be accomplished; "Behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season."

Zacharias soon received an awful testimony of the divinity of the mission of Gabriel, who was no sooner departed than he was struck dumb; for when he came to pray in the course of his office, during the oblation of his incense, he could not utter a word; and was under a necessity of making signs to the people that an angel had appeared to him in the temple, and that he was deprived of the faculty of speech, as a punishment for his doubting the fulfilment of an event which had been foretold concerning him.

Soon after Zacharias departed to his own house, (the days of his ministration being accomplished,) his wife Elizabeth, according to the prediction of the angel, conceived, and retired to a private place, where she lived five months in the uninterrupted exercise of piety, devotion, and contemplation on the mysterious providence of the Almighty, and his amazing goodness to the sinful children of men.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

When Elizabeth was advanced six months in her pregnancy, the same heavenly ambassador was sent to a poor virgin, called Mary, who lived in obscurity in Nazareth, under the care of Joseph, to whom she was espoused. This man and woman were both lineally descended from the house of David, from whose loins it was foretold the great Messiah should spring.

The Virgin being ordained by the Most High to be the mother of the great Saviour of the world, was saluted by the angel in most respectful terms: "Hail! thou that art highly favoured; the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women!" Such an address, from so exalted a being, greatly alarmed the meek and humble Virgin; to allay whose fear, and to encourage whose hope, the angel related, in most sublime terms, the subject of his embassy; which was, to assure her, that she was chosen of God to the greatest honour which could be conferred on a mortal, and which would perpetuate her memory; an honour no less than that of being the mother of the promised and long-expected Messiah, who upon earth should be called *Jesus*, because he should save his people from their sins, be the restorer of human nature, and the procuring cause of eter-

nal bliss to sinners, who had forfeited the favour, and incurred the resentment, of an offended God that this divine person was to be considered as the Son of the Most High God; to whom should be given, by his Almighty father, a throne in the heavenly kingdom, on which he should preside, and which (being the whole church of Christ, the house of Jacob, the spiritual Israel, or the kingdom of the Messiah) should continue for ever and ever.

The astonished Virgin, unmindful that Isaiah had long since prophesied, "that a virgin should conceive and bear a son," thought her virginity an insurmountable barrier to the fulfilment of the prophecy, especially as such an event had never occurred since the creation of the world; and therefore required of the angel an explanation of the manner in which such a circumstance could be effected.

This desire by no means implies her not remembering, that with God all things were possible, but only serves to prove the weakness of her apprehension on the one hand, or her diffidence and sense of her own unworthiness on the other.

The angel, therefore, perceiving the uprightness of her disposition, notwithstanding some little proof of human weakness and shortness of

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

sight, vouchsafed an immediate answer to her inquiry: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee;" or, in other words, this miraculous event shall be brought about by the aid of the Holy Spirit, and wonderful exertion of the power of the Most High. As thy conception shall be effected by the immediate influence of the Holy Ghost; "therefore also that holy thing, which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God." To confirm her faith in the glorious message, the heavenly messenger observed to her, that her cousin Elizabeth, notwithstanding her advanced years, and reputed barrenness, was above six months pregnant, assigning this incontestable argument for the miraculous incident: "For with God nothing shall be impossible."

This reply not only removed all her doubts and fears, but filled her with inexpressible joy, so that she even anticipated the promised felicity: for she, with the rest of the daughters of Jacob, had long indulged the hope of being selected by God to be the honoured mother of the Saviour of Israel; and therefore, on her being assured that such happiness was destined her by the great Disposer of all events, she thus expressed her reliance on the

fulfilment of the Divine promise, and perfect acquiescence in the will of the Almighty: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord! be it unto me according to thy word."

The angel had no sooner departed, than Mary set out for the mountainous country of Judea, though at a very remote distance from Nazareth, in order to rejoice with her cousin Elizabeth in the joyful news she had received from the angel concerning her. The rapture and delight which filled the minds of Mary and Elizabeth, on the occasion of this salutation, can alone be conceived from the affecting description recorded by the evangelist Luke, who is peculiar for the beauty of his style, and elegance of his expressions.

That evangelist writes, that the salutation of Mary had such an effect upon Elizabeth, that, on hearing of the miraculous event which had befallen the Virgin, the babe leaped within her; and that she, being inspired with a holy delight on the approaching prospect of the nativity of her Saviour, exclaimed with rapture, "And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" *Luke i. 43.* Nor did her ecstasy cease with this token of humility and joy on the important event, in the ardour of which she evinced that prophetic

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

influence, which, while it amazed the blessed Virgin, could not fail of establishing her belief in what the angel had foretold; for she repeated the very words expressed by the angel in his salutation of the holy Virgin, "Blessed art thou among women:" together with a quotation from the Psalms, "and blessed is the fruit of thy womb."

Mary conceived the seed long promised and earnestly desired; the seed in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed, according to the words of the Psalmist: "His name shall continue as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed." The happy Virgin, catching the holy flame from the aged Elizabeth, broke out into an humble acknowledgment of her unworthiness, and the wonderful grace of the Almighty, in appointing her to the exalted honour of bearing the Redeemer of Israel; as expressed in those well-known words, "My soul doth magnify the Lord," &c.

Thus having, by this visit, confirmed herself in the belief of the prediction of the angel Gabriel, when the period of Elizabeth's pregnancy approached, she returned to Nazareth, having resided in Judea about three months.

Soon after the departure of Mary, Elizabeth brought forth a son, the

appointed harbinger of the King of glory; and on the eighth day after his birth, according to the Judaical custom, he was circumcised, and called, agreeable to the appointment of the angel, John, alluding, in the Hebrew tongue, to the gracious display of the wisdom and goodness of God, who was about to manifest himself to the world by the spreading of the gospel of his Son, of whom this John was the appointed forerunner.

The promise being thus fulfilled, the aged priest was restored to his speech, and immediately broke out into praise and rapture at the marvellous works of God, in strains which astonished all around him.

This surprising event greatly alarmed the people of the adjacent country, who were divided in their opinions concerning a child, whose birth was attended with so many extraordinary circumstances. Indeed, these incidents were worthy of general admiration; that he who was to be the forerunner of the mighty Saviour of Israel should not make his entrance into life in an obscure and common manner, but with particular tokens of the favour of Heaven, in order to attract the observation of his countrymen, and excite their attention to that ministry which he was called to by the blessed God, even the preparation

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

of the people for the reception of the Messiah, who was shortly to appear in the flesh.

It is observable, that the Baptist, from his infancy, displayed great qualities, both of mind and body : for such was his strength of constitution, through the blessing of the God of nature, that he lived till near the thirtieth year of his age, when his public ministry began, in the mountainous and desert country of Judea, bereft of almost all the comforts of life. But at length the prophecy of the good old Zacharias, relating to his future elevation, was literally fulfilled : “Thou child shalt be called the Prophet of the Highest : for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord, to prepare his ways ; to give knowledge of salvation unto his people, by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God ; whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet in the way of peace.”

As Joseph had betrothed Mary, according to the method of the Jewish espousals, before they came to cohabit together, as man and wife, she was found to be with child : at which he was so much confounded, that he resolved to put her away. yet he purposed doing it *privately*,

probably to prevent that exemplary *punishment* which the law inflicted on those who had violated the faith of their espousals before the marriage was completed, *Deut. xxii. 23, 24*, or the *infamy* of a public divorce.

While he was ruminating on this interesting event, he was overtaken with a pleasing slumber, and received a communication from above, which fully revealed the cause and manner of Mary's pregnancy, dispelled his doubts, and encouraged him to take home his falsely suspected spouse : “Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife ; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.”

The pious Joseph complied with the voice of Heaven most cheerfully : for no sooner did the morning dawn appear, than he rose from his couch, and obeyed the commands of the Most High, by relating to his espoused wife his being assured of her innocence, and immediately restored her to former favour.

While he related to her the manner of this extraordinary revelation by a messenger from Heaven, he discovered in her a remarkable chastity of heart, entirely conformable to so mysterious an operation, and knew her not till she had brought forth the great Redeemer of Israel.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Thus was fulfilled that which was foretold by the prophets, and particularly the prediction of Isaiah, which imported that a virgin should bring forth a son. "Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us," *Isaiah* vii. 4, *Matt.* i. 23.

CHAPTER II.

General Decree for Taxation published.—Birth of Christ.—Declaration of the same to the Shepherds.—Circumcision and Presentation of Christ in the Temple.—The wise men of the East worship the holy Child.—Flight of Joseph into Egypt.—Massacre of Infants at Bethlehem.—Death of Herod,—And return of Joseph out of Egypt.

AUGUSTUS CÆSAR, the Roman emperor, having at this time issued an edict for a general taxation, on all the nations, cities, and towns subject to the empire, king Herod, in consequence of that decree, commanded all under his government to muster in the city of his people, or place of his descent, that an estimate might be taken of their persons and effects. Pursuant to this order, Joseph and Mary, as descendants from the line of David, departed from Nazareth, where they then resided, and came to Bethelhem, a city of Judea, the place of the nativity of David and his ancestors.

So numerous were the people that repaired to this place on account of the general decree, that every dwelling was occupied; and Joseph and Mary, though they could not depart thence till after the taxation, were forced to take up their residence in a stable, the spot in which it pleased the Divine wisdom should be born the Lord of life and glory, who, as a perfect example of humility to all his followers, was to make his entrance into, and his exit out of, this lower world, in a very mean and humble manner.

With what humble amazement should we contemplate this first appearance of our incarnate Redeemer. Surely all the angels of heaven might justly have admired his condescension in assuming such a nature as ours, and wearing a mortal frame, though it had been attended with all the ornaments and splendours which earth could have given it. Though, at his entrance into our lower world, he had been born of an imperial family, placed under a canopy of velvet and gold, or laid to repose on pillows of down, all this had been deep abasement in the eyes of those who had beheld the glories of his celestial throne, and the honour paid him by cherubim and seraphim. But, behold, the Son of God and the Heir of all things is not merely in the abodes

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

of men, but in a place destined for beasts, and, while “wrapped in swaddling clothes, is laid in a manger.”

Yet, O blessed Jesus, how much more venerable was that stable and manger, when graced with thy sacred presence, than the most magnificent palace, or most shining throne, of earthly princes! How ill doth it become thy disciples to seek great things for themselves in this life, or to be proud of its pomp and grandeur! Give us, O God, the simplicity of children, and make us willing to be conformed to the birth of thy Son, as well as to his death.

The manner and place of our Lord's birth certainly demand our highest admiration and wonder, as a striking display of wisdom, both in the direction and accomplishment of the will of his heavenly Father. Considered in his divine nature, heaven is the habitation of his seat, and the earth is his footstool: considered in his human nature, he is humbled beneath all, being confined within the narrow limits of a manger! Though, as the Son of God, he is “the brightness of his Father's glory, the express image of his person, and his throne is for ever and ever!” as the Son of man, O wondrous condescension! he is wrapped in the

meanest swaddling-clothes; and, as man, he takes up his habitation with the beasts of the field. In fine, let us adore his grace and love in veiling those glories for a time which he enjoyed at the right hand of his Father, assuming our nature, and that in its humblest state, in order to raise us to that degree of glory and happiness which, by our apostacy from God, we had justly forfeited; exulting with the prophet, “Sing, O heavens! and be joyful, O earth! and break forth into singing, O mountains! for the Lord hath comforted his people.”

But the humble manner in which the blessed Jesus made his appearance in the world, did not long eclipse the glory of his descent; a heavenly messenger being despatched from above, to apprise mankind of their Saviour's incarnation. It pleased the wise Disposer of all things, by his holy angel, first to make known to some honest shepherds, who were watching their flocks by night in the neighbouring fields, the birth of the long-promised, long-expected Messiah. The radiance which shone around them terrified the astonished peasants; but, to dissipate their fears, and confirm their joys, the divine messenger interposed, and thus addressed them: “Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the baby wrapped in swaddling-clothes, lying in a manger," *Luke ii. 10, &c.*

The glorious news was no sooner proclaimed, than a number of the celestial choir were heard to resound the praises of the Almighty, for this transcendent display of his goodness to sinful men: "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men. Transported with the happy tidings of the birth of the Redeemer of Israel, the angel no sooner departed, than the shepherds hastened to Bethlehem in quest of the babe, whom, according to the information of the sacred missionary, they found wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and lying in a manger. This event, so exactly conformable to the angel's prediction, equally delighted and amazed them; nor could they conceal the purport of his mission, but published abroad all they had seen and heard.

Having viewed, with praise and wonder, their long-expected Saviour, and offered their grateful praises to God for the manifestation of his

goodness to mankind, they departed, with hearts filled with love and gratitude, still glorifying the Almighty Parent of universal nature.

After the expiration of eight days from the birth of the holy infant, he was circumcised, according to the Mosaic institution; and thus, by a few drops, gave earnest of the abundance of blood which he was to shed for the purification of mankind. The blessed Redeemer passed through the ceremony, not that he stood in any necessity of conforming to laws of any kind, being the supreme Lawgiver, with respect to his exalted nature; but as considered in his humble state, "he was born of a woman, made under the law," and "came," according to his own declaration, "to fulfil all righteousness," it was requisite he should conform to that custom which characterized the Jewish nation, and was one of the principal injunctions of the Mosaic law, under which he was born; in order to fulfil all that is spoken of him in the scriptures.

Besides, as all the promises made to Abraham were to be fulfilled in the Messiah, it was necessary he should receive the seal of circumcision, in order to prove his descent from the patriarch, concerning whom it was foretold, "In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." As a further reason for

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

our Lord's compliance with this Jewish institution, we may urge the propriety of his finishing the former dispensation by an exact adherence to his rules, as he was about to establish another and much better, which could not be effected more fully, than by conforming to that sacrament which was of divine injunction, and indispensably requisite to admission into the former.

As the same institution also required that every first-born son, without any regard to circumstance or family, should be presented to the Lord, in the temple, by delivering him into the hands of the priest and paying five shekels, together with an offering, which, from the poorer sort, consisted of a pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons; (a ceremony in commemoration of the divine mercy in sparing the first-born of Israel, when those of Egypt, both man and beast, were destroyed;) his parents, having tarried at Bethlehem till the days of Mary's purification were accomplished, brought the child Jesus to Jerusalem, and there presented him in the temple to the Lord, in the manner thus described, with the offering allowed to the poorer sort of people;—a repeated instance of the exact obedience of the immaculate Jesus to the ceremonial law, as well as the poverty

of his parents, though descended from a royal house.

During the presentation of the holy infant, there entered the temple a pious and venerable old man, named Simeon, who, with all the devout, had “waited day and night for the consolation of Israel,” and to whom it had been revealed by the Spirit of truth, that he should not depart this mortal life, till he had seen the Lord of life and salvation.

Accordingly, it was signified to him by the Holy Ghost, at whose instance he came at the precise time into the temple, that the child there presented was the long-expected Messiah, even the Redeemer of Israel. In an ecstasy of joy he embraced the heavenly infant in his arms, and exclaimed, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel,” *Luke ii. 29—32.*

The exultation of Simeon astonished the parents of our Lord; not as unworthy the divine subject of it, to which are due strains superior either to men or angels; but as evincing the old man's certain knowledge that the child was the promised Messiah, though he was an absolute stranger. But their sur-



The burnt offering.



Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

prise was soon removed by Simeon's saying unto Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel:" or, in other words, This is the stumbling-block and rock of offence, which it was long foretold by God should be laid in Zion, and which should occasion the fall of many in Israel: for through the humble manner of his birth, and his abject state upon earth, he became despised and rejected of men; yet he is set for the rising again of many, who shall rely on his merits, and submit to his government.

Commentators are divided in their opinions concerning this old Simeon. Some think he was of the order of priests, and that he uttered the words cited above, while he was presenting the child to the Lord, in the office of his function. But as the Evangelist, who recites in a particular manner the presentation of our blessed Lord, is silent on that head, it appears little more than conjecture.

Others affirm he was "Simon the Just," a disciple of the famous Hillel, the master of Gamaliel, under whom the apostle Paul was educated; and that while he was attempting to explain to the people that passage in the prophecy of Isaiah, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son" it was revealed to him, that he should see with mortal eyes the

promised Messiah; and that on his beholding the child and his mother in the temple, he broke out into that well-known doxology. But this could not be, for Simon the Just lived till forty-one years after the death of Christ; and it has been affirmed by Eusebius, that he was not above seventy when he died. Besides, it is remarkable, that the Almighty, at that time, was pleased to reveal his will with respect to the Messiah, not to the great, the wise, and the learned, but to the poor and illiterate, such as Joseph a carpenter, Zacharias an ordinary priest, and a company of shepherds: therefore, as the point is not settled, we presume to offer it as our opinion, that this old man, to whom God was pleased to make so extraordinary a revelation concerning the Saviour of the world, was a plain man, rather eminent for the piety of his heart than the knowledge of his head, and who possessed more grace and devotion than learning and earthly pomp.

A certain good prophetess, called Anna, who had a long time waited for the redemption of Israel, entering the temple at the instant in which Simeon exulted in the birth of the heavenly infant, and finding that he was the promised Messiah, likewise joined with him in praising God, and went forth and declared

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

the glad tidings of salvation to all the faithful in these parts.

Having, in every respect, complied with the ceremonies and rites contained in the law of Moses, Joseph and Mary, with the child Jesus, “entered into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.” They did not, however, long abide there, for having adjusted their affairs, they returned again to Bethlehem, the place of our Lord’s nativity.

This step seems to have been pursued in consequence of their opinion, that it was necessary, in order to his being acknowledged the Messiah *sent by God*, that he should reside some time in the place of his birth. Whatever was their motive for removal, it is evident, from scripture, that while they were in Bethlehem, with their Son, certain Eastern philosophers, called Magi, or Wise Men, came, in consequence of the appearance they had seen, to Jerusalem, and inquired for the King of the Jews, declaring they had seen his star in their own quarter, and were come to pay him the adorations due to his dignity.

Various conjectures have been formed by the learned concerning this star, which is said to have appeared in the east: some think it was the Spirit of God, others an angel, some a comet, others a luminous appearance, &c. A modern

writer thinks it was the glory that surrounded the angels, who had appeared before the shepherds of Bethlehem on the night of our blessed Lord’s nativity.

But, notwithstanding these uncertain conjectures, the star answered the end designed, and directed the Magi to the spot where resided the Lord of life and glory. Some men, too wise to admit of the evidences from revelation, have sceptically inquired, how these eastern Magi could arrive at any knowledge that the Jews expected the Messiah? and that, therefore, on the appearance of this new star in the firmament, how they should apprehend it pointed out the birth of the great Redeemer of Israel? The learned assertors of the Christian cause, in answer to these queries, observe, that an opinion of the approach of the Messiah’s kingdom had long prevailed all over the East, nay, this is declared in profane history, by Suetonius, Tacitus, and others.

The reason of this prevailing opinion is very obvious. The Jews conceived mighty expectations of the Messiah, from the many prophecies concerning him recorded in their own language; and the Arabians, from the prophecies to the same import made to Abraham, it being certain that those people

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

retained traditional knowledge of this promise, from the words of Balaam, who was an Arabian prophet, "There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall arise out of Israel," &c., which every impartial reader must acknowledge refers to the appearance of the Messiah only, but not to any other incident whatever.

The other eastern nations derived their expectations of the Messiah from their commercial connections with the Jews and Arabians, but more especially from the Jews, who being scattered over the whole country of the east, spread their religion wherever they went; which occasioned several Roman historians to take notice of the prevalence of that opinion.

Nay, the expectation of the Messiah being born in Judea, was strongly impressed on the minds of the followers of Zoroaster, who reformed the religion of the Persians, being a servant to the prophet Daniel, and particularly favoured with revelations concerning the appearance of the Messiah.

From these considerations, it evidently appears that this opinion prevailed throughout the East, and that the Magi might, with great reason, on the appearance of the star, repair to Jerusalem, in quest of the promised Saviour of Israel.

But to leave this subject, as not immediately appertaining to our purpose.—The whole city of Jerusalem was alarmed at the unexpected arrival of the Eastern Magi; an event which much perplexed the tyrant Herod, whose ambitious mind maintained the utmost aversion to the very thought of a rival or competitor, and consequently could not brook a report that favoured the news of the birth of the King of the Jews.

Disguising, however, his sentiments, he received the Magi with seeming respect, attended to the design of their errand with affected complacency, and, to gratify their curiosity, summoned a general council, and demanded of them where Christ should be born? The council kept him not long in suspense; for, well remembering that the prophets had particularly foretold the place of his birth, they replied to the demand of their monarch, "In Bethlehem of Judea;" and, to confirm their answer, cited prophetic authority; "And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel, *Matt.* ii. 6.—The tyrant king, in consequence of the reply from the supreme council of the nation, directed the Magi to Bethlehem, as the place,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

according to ancient prophecy, designed for the honour of Christ's nativity, earnestly entreating them, at the same time, immediately on their finding out the child, to send him word, that he might repair thither, and pay his adoration to him also.

But this was mere pretence, and vile hypocrisy: for, so far was Herod from entertaining any religious regard for the infant Jesus, that he vowed in his heart to destroy him as soon as he should be found, looking on him as designed for a temporal prince, who would expel him or his descendants from the throne of Judea, instead of a prince whose kingdom was wholly spiritual, and whose throne was not to be established upon earth, but in the heavenly Jerusalem.

Although we have many stronger proofs of the divinity of our Saviour's mission than his miraculous preservation from the designs of the ambitious Herod, yet this was very remarkable. The tyrant, in this case, acted with the utmost subtlety: he declined accompanying the wise men in person; nor did he even send attendants with them, who, under the guise of honouring them, might have secretly informed him of the abode of the Messiah. In short, he acted with such apparent indifference, as if he had no peculiar

reason for despatching them on the occasion.

However, the Magi, having obtained the intelligence they sought in Jerusalem, set forward under the guidance of the same star that conducted them from their own country, but had left them on their arrival in Judea; which was the cause of their directing their course to the capital, in order to seek that information, which, by the desertion of the star, became requisite. Thus it appears the design of the Almighty, in directing the Eastern Magi to the capital of Judea, was, that the whole nation might be made acquainted with the cause of their journey.

Accordingly, they had no sooner proceeded from Jerusalem, on their way to Bethlehem, than their kind conductor again appeared, went before them to the very city, and fixed on the habitation of the heavenly infant. Guided by this celestial conductor, they entered the house, and, prostrating themselves at the sacred feet of their spiritual King, presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Having thus accomplished the design of the expedition, they proposed, according to promise, returning to Jerusalem; but being diverted from that intention by a dream, in which they were warned by God of Herod's design, they pursued another



Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

course towards their own country, and by those means defeated his malicious purpose.

But it is natural and reasonable to suppose, that the end of the divine wisdom, in directing these Eastern Magi to the kingdom of Judea, to worship the child Jesus, was not merely to gratify the curiosity of the wise men, because the event promoted many other very important designs, some of which we shall mention.

It proved to succeeding ages, the great expectations the Gentiles formed of the appearance of the Messiah, and consequently established the truth of those prophecies which related to that event, as well as excited in the minds of men the most sanguine hopes and longing desires.

As these Magi doubtless reported, on their return to their own countrymen, the particulars they had heard and seen in the kingdom of Judea, relative to the Messiah, such report must certainly have promoted the belief of the gospel in those parts, when afterwards preached there by the apostles. The expedition of the wise men was the cause of the answer of the Sanhedrim, in which it was unanimously declared to be the opinion of all the Jewish Rabbies then living, that, according to ancient prophecies, Bethlehem

was the place appointed by the Almighty to give birth to the promised Messiah.

It also contributed to another valuable purpose, in that the offerings of the wise men procured a subsistence for the holy family in Egypt, whither they were soon after warned to fly, in order to escape the vengeance of the enraged king: for no sooner had the wise men departed from Bethlehem, than Joseph was warned, by a heavenly messenger, of the barbarous purpose of Herod, and commanded to flee into Egypt, with the young child and his mother.

Joseph, in obedience to the Almighty's command, rose that very night, and prepared to go into Egypt, "and was there until the death of Herod; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, Out of Egypt have I called my Son." This prophecy, which is quoted from Hosea, seems originally to refer to the Israelites, though the Evangelist's reference will be amply justified, by considering that the Egyptian captivity alludes to the subjection of the Israelites to great hardships, and their deliverance from the same by an almighty hand.

Now, as the departure of the holy family into Egypt was in obedience to the divine command, in

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

order to protect the holy Jesus from the incensed Herod, the application of the prophet, "Out of Egypt have I called my Son," appears very just, as well as elegant. The king of Judea long waited, with the most earnest expectation, the return of the wise men, anxious to glut his full resentment on the innocent Jesus; till, from their long delay, he began to suspect a delusion, and that his designs were frustrated by some extraordinary interposition of Providence.

At length, irritated by disappointment, he resolved to accomplish by cruelty a resolution he could not effect by art; and accordingly issued orders to a large party of soldiers to go throughout Bethlehem, and the neighbouring villages, and massacre all the children they could find therein, from two years old and under; thinking that the infant Jesus, whom as a prince he both envied and dreaded, would fall in the general slaughter.

But the heavenly missionary was sheltered from above; nor was the relentless king permitted to impede the design of an Almighty Creator.

However, the cities through which the soldiers carried the destructive sword exhibited such scenes of horror and distress, as could not fail to pierce every soul not entirely lost to humanity; no

sound was heard but the affecting cries of parents, the groans of expiring babes, and a general imprecation of vengeance on the merciless tyrant. But he did not long survive his cruel decree, being swept from his throne by a nauseous disease to answer for his conduct at the bar of a tremendous judge.

No description can paint the horror of such a scene of relentless cruelty in a more glaring light, than the verse quoted by the Evangelist Matthew, from the prophet Jeremiah, "Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation and weeping, and great mourning: Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they were not."—This prophecy must not be understood literally, but descriptively, or as a figure used to display the horror of the scene as there applied by the Evangelist, in which acceptation it has a peculiar beauty; representing Rachel, the beloved wife of Jacob, buried many years ago in the fields of Bethlehem, awakened by the cries of slaughtered infants, bursting even the chains of death, and lamenting the hapless fate of the murdered innocents which surrounded her.

The tyrant Herod being thus cut

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

off from the face of the earth, Joseph was warned by an heavenly messenger to return to the land of Israel. The good old man obeyed the Almighty's command, and appears to have had a great desire of residing in Judea, and very probably in Bethlehem: but hearing that Herod was succeeded in his throne by his son Archelaus, and fearing that he might pursue the barbarous design of his father, he directed his course another way; but being warned again by a heavenly mission, he retired into Galilee, then under the government of a mild and benevolent prince, called Antipas, and took up his habitation at Nazareth, where the particular circumstances which attended the birth of the blessed Jesus were not generally known. The Evangelist affirms, that Joseph, with the infant and his mother, resided in Nazareth, where the holy Jesus spent his youth; "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene."

The advocates for infidelity, whose notice the smallest apparent inaccuracy in the sacred scriptures has not escaped, have not failed to observe, that the Evangelist refers to what he cannot justify from any of the prophetical writings, in which there are no such

words to be found, "He shall be called a Nazarene." But be it known, that the Evangelist may, with justice, be vindicated from impropriety, by reminding these sceptics, that though the very words are not to be found, the allusion is just, and consequently the application. This expression refers to the general contempt and ridicule in which the Israelites held the Galileans, and especially the Nazarenes, who were even despised by the Galileans themselves, inasmuch that the word Nazarene became a term of reproach.

Now, as the prophets in general foretold the disgrace and infamy through which the blessed Jesus should pass, they consequently foretold he should be called a Nazarene, or be exposed to every token of contempt and ridicule, of which this appellation, at that time, was a remarkable instance.

It is evident that our Lord's residing at Nazareth tended in a remarkable manner to the fulfilment of those prophecies, because, in the course of his public ministry, he was frequently reproached with the same; and his countrymen often urged it as a reason for their disregard of his doctrine. But as the stubbornness of unbelief will never admit of conviction, we have therefore added these remarks, to con-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

firm the faith of the Christian, rather than convince the obstinate Infidel.

CHAPTER III.

State of our Lord's Childhood, and private Life.—His Arguments with the Jewish Doctors.—Mission, Character, and Doctrine of the Baptist.—Baptism of Christ, and visible Descent of the Spirit on that Solemnity.

THE precise circumstances of our Lord's childhood and life, previous to his public ministry, cannot be ascertained from the writings of any of the Evangelists, which can alone be relied on as authentic. All we can gather from those inspired men is, that the faculties of his mind were enlarged in proportion to the growth of his body, inso-much that he arrived at the very perfection of heavenly wisdom.

As his parents were mean and poor, he had not the advantage of a finished education ; and he seems to have received no other instruction than what his parents gave him, in conformity to the Jewish laws. But supernatural abilities amply compensated for the deficiency of natural acquirements ; and he gave instances, in his earliest years, of amazing penetration and consummate wisdom.

According to the Mosaic institu-

tion, his parents annually went up to Jerusalem ; and when he arrived at the age of twelve years, carried him with them to that city, in order that he might early imbibe the precepts of religion and virtue. In this place the holy Jesus tarried, without the knowledge, and, consequently, without the consent, of his parents, who departed with the rest that were going towards Galilee ; and thinking that he was gone forward with some of their relations or acquaintance, they continued their journey, not doubting but they should overtake him on the road, or meet with him at the place where they had appointed to lodge. But on their arrival, not finding the child in the village, nor amongst their relations, they returned to Jerusalem, much troubled ; and, after a most anxious search of three days, found him in the temple, sitting among the learned doctors, who were amazed at the wisdom of his questions, and the pertinence of his replies ; which were greatly superior to the utmost they could expect from one of his tender years and mean education.

These doctors, or expounders of the law, among the Jews, always taught the people publicly on the three great festivals ; and it was on one of these public occasions that the blessed Jesus gave such mani-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

fest proofs of his wisdom and penetration, as astonished all the beholders many of whom thought he must be something more than human. As, according to his own declaration, he was employed in his Father's business, it is natural to think, in the course of his disputes, he modestly corrected some of the errors which the Jewish doctors then taught, and which were repugnant to the principles of that religion he came to promote and establish. The wonder of his parents at finding him in such sublime employment, was beyond expression; though his pious mother, notwithstanding the pleasure which the discovery afforded her, could not help shewing the concern which his absence, without their knowledge, had occasioned them, by addressing him thus, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." To this question he replied, "That their surprise at his absenting himself without their knowledge was groundless and absurd; as they might have been assured, from his extraordinary birth, and the wonderful circumstances attending it, that his Father was no less than the Almighty One of Israel; that he assumed human nature to promote his glorious designs; and, therefore, as his errand

was of such moment, they must not imagine he could always reside with them." "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"

Though his parents did not clearly discern the force of this excellent remonstrance, his pious mother committed his words to memory; and, together with Joseph her husband, joyfully returned with him to their poor dwelling at Nazareth, where he lived with them in dutiful subjection; and thereby afforded a noble example for the imitation of all children, who certainly are bound to yield obedience to their parents; since the Son of God himself, when on earth, has set them the pattern, by practising every branch of filial duty to his earthly parents.

The blessed Jesus continued in this lowly state for some time, during which he greatly advanced both in knowledge and stature; and, by his extraordinary qualities, attracted the regard and admiration of all who either saw or heard him.

Being happily free from those inordinate disquieting desires which disturb and distract mortals, he was always in temper calm and sedate, which, added to a pleasant countenance, combined to prove the strength of his faculties, and the goodness of his disposition. He

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

was also an excellent orator, being endowed with a most nervous and persuasive elocution, insomuch that his hearers, frequently astonished at the substance and manner of his address, would suddenly cry out, "Never man spake like this man!" Though, considered in his divine nature, he was so far superior to human nature, during the time in which he lived thus humbly with his parents, yet, it is supposed, he condescended to work with his father at his trade of a carpenter, and thereby left us a shining example of industry.

Thus obscurely did the blessed Jesus live, till the time of his public ministry; nor did he shew any miracles, or perform any actions, to distinguish him from the rest of mankind: his divine nature, and the annexed properties, during the time of his private life, being concealed under the veil of his human nature.

As this is the whole account, collected from sacred history, concerning the childhood and private life of the blessed Jesus, the Saviour of mankind, we must content ourselves therewith, not seeking to indulge a curiosity, which such silence seems to forbid, as sinful—as impertinent.

Many people, of more speculation than piety, may be induced to inquire the cause which prevented

the Evangelists giving us an exact detail of the transactions of our blessed Saviour's life, from the twelfth year of his age till the time of his public ministry. To such we answer, that the design of the inspired writers being to instruct rather than amuse, they consulted our interest more than our humour and caprice; and that, therefore, the wisdom of God, by whose inspiration they wrote, demands our admiration, in that they passed over less important parts of our Saviour's life, which would have swelled their Gospels to an enormous bulk, fit only for the perusal of the studious, and those persons who had much vacant time; whereas the four Gospels, as they are written, make only a small volume, which is convenient for carriage, for reading, for the memory to retain, as well as adapted, by the plainness of its style, to the meanest capacities; notwithstanding which, they contain all the important transactions of our Saviour's life, such as those which relate to his mediatorial office, the design of his incarnation, which was to teach us those things that belong to our eternal peace and happiness; to instruct us in his heavenly doctrines, as our prophet; to offer himself a sacrifice upon the cross, as our priest; and to burst the chains of

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

death, and triumphantly ascend into heaven, as King or head of his church.

The omission, therefore, can be of no real consequence, since "these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that, believing, ye might have life through his name."

During the obscure state of our blessed Redeemer, at Nazareth, the emperor Augustus died in Campania, after a long reign of above forty years, to the general regret of the whole Roman empire. He was succeeded by Tiberius, his stepson, a prince of a very different temper of mind from his predecessor. This emperor, in the second year of his reign, recalled Rufus from the government of Judea, and sent Valerius Gracchus to succeed him. After reigning eleven years, Gracchus was recalled, and succeeded by Pontius Pilate, a person resembling, in disposition, his master Tiberius, who was malicious, cruel, and covetous.

Soon after Pontius Pilate was appointed to the government of Judea, John the Baptist began to open his commission for preparing our Saviour's way before him, according as was appointed, by preaching "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." Sacred history has not informed us of the

manner in which the Baptist spent the former part of his life; but, according to ancient tradition, Elizabeth, hearing of Herod's barbarous massacre of the infants of Bethlehem, fled into the wilderness, to secure the infant John from the relentless cruelty of that inhuman monster, and there nurtured him with all the tenderness of an affectionate mother. John the Baptist was about eighteen months old when his mother fled with him into the wilderness; within forty days after which she died.

His aged father Zacharias, when he afterwards officiated in the temple, was slain by the command of Herod, for refusing to discover the place of his son's abode. The intended harbinger of the blessed Jesus, being thus deprived of his earthly parents, the Father of the fatherless took compassion on him, and sent an angel to defend and support him, till he had attained to a sufficient age and strength to provide for himself.

It appears, from the accounts of the evangelists, that he dwelt in the desert till the time of his public ministry, resembling the ancient prophet Elijah, in the meanness of his clothing, and plainness of his diet. His dress was composed of camel's hair, his food the spontaneous productions of the wilderness,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

such as locusts and wild honey, and his drink the pure water of some crystal spring. His course of life was, indeed, admirably adapted to the doctrine of repentance which he preached, as well as to engage the attention of his hearers; so that it appears highly reasonable that those people who waited the coming of the Messiah with earnest expectation, should flock to him, anxious to hear what he had to deliver concerning him.

He proved very successful in his ministry, as he enforced the doctrine of repentance, because the kingdom of heaven was at hand: persons of all degrees and professions flocked to him, confessed their sins, were baptized in Jordan, and submitted to whatever the prophet prescribed as necessary to obtain an inheritance in that kingdom, the approach of which he came to declare. Amongst his converts were many of the Pharisaical tribe, some of whom confessed their sins, and were likewise baptized in Jordan.

The conversion of the Pharisees surprised the Baptist, knowing that they maintained a high opinion of their own sanctity, for which reason it was very astonishing that they should express any desire of obtaining a remission of their sins. In short, he was much surprised to find the whole nation so affected by

his threatenings, especially as he knew they expected salvation on account of their being of the seed of Abraham, a conceit which they greatly cherished, and which they seem to have derived from a misrepresentation of the following passage: "Thus saith the Lord, who giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinance of the moon, and the stars, for a light by night; who divideth the sea, when the waves thereof roar; the Lord of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith the Lord, If the heaven above can be measured, and the foundation of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off the seed of Israel, for all that they have done, saith the Lord."

But the Baptist, to curb their arrogance, called them the offspring of vipers, instead of the children of Abraham; perhaps, the Pharisees and Sadducees applied to John for baptism, thinking by that means to avoid the danger they might incur, from being the avowed enemies of the Messiah, whom they expected to come in all the pomp of royalty, and to maintain his superiority by force of arms.

The Baptist, who was no stranger to those hypocritical sects well

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

knowing that their application to him arose from sinister views, severely reprimanded them in general; "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth fruits worthy of repentance."—O deceivers, hypocrites, whence have you obtained knowledge of the approaching event I am destined, by God, to make known? Whence have you a sense of the impending judgment of the Almighty? I have plainly told the only method of avoiding it, by a sincere repentance, which can only be evinced by the conformity of the heart and life to the word and will of God. "And begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." Deceive not yourselves with a vain presumption that eternal blessings are yours, merely on the score of your lineal descent from Abraham; such pretence will avail you nothing; for to partake of the promises made to that father of the faithful alone, spiritually considered, you must shew forth some resemblance of his faith and piety.

The Almighty Creator, who formed our first parent out of the dust, and caused Sarah to bear a son unto Abraham when they were

both well stricken in years, can, by virtue of his omnipotence, raise up children unto that faithful patriarch, even from these very stones; children indeed, who by the integrity of their hearts, and purity of their lives, shall prove their spiritual alliance to Abraham, and share with him the promised salvation.

The Baptist, by this plain, but honest declaration, at once set at nought the towering expectations of this hypocritical tribe, by shewing them that God respected the heart alone, and that all their pretences to descent, ceremonies, and other outward parade, was of no avail with him who tried the heart, and searched the reins of the children of men. He went farther, and assured them, that conviction and confession of sin were not sufficient, no, nor even a promise to forsake it; but that there must be a speedy and actual putting it into practice. "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Delay not this important work, for the judgments of the Almighty are at hand; therefore, if you continue in your sins, impending ruin will certainly fall upon you.

Nothing could be more sincere, nothing better calculated, than this doctrine of the forerunner of the blessed Jesus: it struck at the very root of the Jewish prejudices, which

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

induced too many of them vainly to rely on outward rites and ceremonies, prayers, fastings, &c., which, if not performed with a proper spirit, and from proper views, were an abomination to a holy God. Nor did his conduct less reprove the pride and hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees, than his doctrine; for whereas those upstart people used to shun the converse of the publicans, and meaner sort, and would rarely deign to give them instruction; the humble Baptist received their applications in the most submissive manner, and preached to them the absolute necessity of repentance, faith, and obedience.

Indeed, throughout the whole of his ministration, he happily adapted his discourses to the circumstances and capacities of the various people he addressed; and took every pious means to prepare them for the reception of the promised Messiah, who was shortly to appear amongst them in the glorious character of Saviour and Redeemer of Israel.

Thus, by a life of inflexible virtue, discourses nervous and pathetic, exhortations sincere and fervent, and rebukes honest and courageous, the Baptist became renowned throughout the region of Judea. Such was the admiration of the people at his life and doctrine, that from the vision of his

father Zacharias in the temple, the arrival of the Magi at Jerusalem, the prophecies of Simeon, (circumstances recent in their memories,) they began to conjecture that John might be the promised Messiah, and were even ready to pronounce him the Redeemer of Israel; so that, had he aspired to worldly dignity, he might, for a time, have shone in all the grandeur of human pomp, and claimed a regard superior to any of the sons of men. But, pious in principle, and humble in heart, he could not arrogate honours of which he was conscious of his unworthiness; and therefore honestly undeceived his numerous followers, by assuring them, that so far from being the glorious Person promised, he was only his forerunner; and that such was his own inferiority, that he was unworthy of doing his most menial offices. "I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose." *Luke iii. 16.*

During the time of the Baptist's continuance at Bethabara, the blessed Jesus left his retirement at Nazareth, and, previous to his public ministry, repaired to the banks of the river Jordan, where John was executing his commission from above, in order to be there baptized by him. We cannot impute this

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

conduct of our Lord to any necessity there was of his conforming to the institution of baptism ; for purity needs not cleansing ; it is therefore evident, that his motive was to add a sanction to that ordinance, for ever after appointed to be the initiating rite of Christianity, "Go, baptize all nations," &c.

It appears that John immediately, as it were by a prophetic revelation, knew the Saviour of the world ; for we find from the Evangelist, that he acknowledges his superiority, and declined the office : "I have need to be baptized of thee ; and comest thou to me ?" Our Lord's answer, though short, is very full and expressive : "Suffer it to be so now : for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." As if he had said, Regard not the precedence at this time, but perform thy office ; for it is necessary that we should, in the minutest point, conform to the Divine will by which this institution is enjoined.

This remonstrance removed the objections of John, and he baptized the immaculate Jesus in the river Jordan, in the presence of numerous spectators.

When the ceremony was performed, as he needed not the instructions usually given on the occasion, he went up straightway out of the water, and, kneeling on the

bank of the river, fervently addressed his almighty Father for an abundant effusion of his Holy Spirit ; as he was now entering on his public ministry, the prelude of his important mission, the end of which was the salvation of mankind.

His prayer was heard, his request was granted ; and an immediate attestation of the Divine pleasure given, by a visible ray of glory around him, and an audible voice proceeding from the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, and pronouncing these words, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased ;" distinguishing his peculiar approbation of the blessed Jesus by the epithet beloved, as well as his standing in that relation to him in a manner nearer than any of the human race, who are called, in common, the sons of men. This voice resembled not any human sound ; but was loud and awful, like the thunders of heaven, in order to strike with reverence the surrounding multitude, and publicly declare the holy mission of the promised Messiah.

The blessed Jesus was called, in the Old Testament, the Son of God ; but was on this occasion declared, by the Almighty himself, to be the long-expected Deliverer of Israel. Thus all who were present at this marvellous descent of the Holy Spirit, were amply convinced of the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

divine mission of our blessed Lord, by an infallible testimony from above: this being the "Star that was to come out of Jacob, and the Sceptre that was to arise out of Israel; the Shiloh, foretold by the patriarch Jacob; the "Great Prophet," by Moses; the "Holy One," by David; the "Prince of Peace," by Isaiah; and the "Son of man."

But this remarkable event tended much more to the glory of the Messiah than all those prophecies; as it was, in some measure, a real display of what they could only picture in the dark.

Let our Lord's submitting himself to baptism, teach us a holy exactness and care in the observance of those positive institutions which owe their obligations merely to a Divine command; for thus it also becometh us to fulfil all righteousness; lest, by breaking one of the least of Christ's commandments, and teaching others to do it, we become unworthy of a part in the kingdom of heaven.

Let us remember in how distinguishing a sense Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed of God, to whom the Father hath not given the spirit by measure, but hath poured it out upon him in the most abundant degree. Let us trace the workings of this Spirit in grace and holiness; earnestly praying that this holy

unction may from Christ our head descend upon our souls. May his enlivening Spirit kindle its sacred flame there with such vigour, that many waters may not be able to quench it, nor the floods of temptation to drown it!

CHAPTER IV.

Commencement of our Saviour's Ministry.—His Temptation in the Wilderness.—Deputation of the Sanhedrim to John the Baptist.—First Miracle wrought by the blessed Jesus.

THE great Redeemer having thus complied with the institution of baptism, and received a most convincing testimony of his heavenly Father's approbation, by the miraculous descent and effusion of the Holy Ghost upon him, while praying on the banks of Jordan, in the presence of a multitude of spectators, entered on his public ministry, at the age of thirty years, according to the custom of the priests among the Jews.

It was apprehended by the people, that as he had just begun his public office, he would repair to Jerusalem, the seat of power and grandeur, in order to display to the mighty and the learned his miraculous abilities and effulgent glories.

But, averse to human parade, the heavenly-minded Jesus preferred so-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

litude to the noise and hurry of public life; he therefore retired into the wilderness, in order to prepare himself by fasting, meditation, prayer, and sustaining temptation, for the important work on which he was entering, the salvation of mankind.

To promote this grand design, the evangelists write, that this retirement into the wilderness was in consequence of the immediate direction of the divine Spirit. Though solitude itself is melancholy, the blessed Jesus added to the dismal scene, by retiring on a barren spot, surrounded by high and craggy mountains, and forming a dark and gloomy chaos.

In this wild and dreary situation the great Redeemer, as Moses and Elijah had done before him, fasted forty days and forty nights, maintained an incessant communion with his heavenly Father, digested the doctrine he was about to deliver, and the obedience he came to perform; and, by a total abstinence from food for forty days and forty nights, evinced the divinity of his mission; or, in other words, proved that he was "a teacher from God." But the melancholy solitude of a desert, and the extremes of hunger and thirst, were but a small part of our Saviour's sufferings in the wilderness. Satan, that implacable foe to mankind, was permitted to buffet him with the

most insinuating wiles, and assail him with the most alluring temptations, in order to attempt the defeat of Heaven's most gracious designs, and keep mankind under the dreadful dominion of sin and death.

The enemies of revelation have not failed to represent this event in a most ludicrous manner; if any, therefore, should demand why God permitted his only Son, the Saviour of the world, to be tempted by the devil, whose power was deemed to be restrained, we reply as follows: One cause of the Redeemer's being suffered to be tempted was, that he, being personally acquainted with the wiles of Satan, might become a faithful and compassionate high-priest, know how to succour his people in time of adversity, and pity them when they fell into temptations.

That in order to be a shining pattern of every virtue, and also a wise and valiant general, the blessed Redeemer underwent all the difficulties and trials attending his service, that we, being animated by his glorious example, might not sink under the pressure and troubles which God, for our good, should be pleased to lay upon us.

The Saviour of the world hath not only been exposed to poverty and ridicule, but also to the most trying temptations of Satan; that as the Captain of our salvation has

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

undergone the same, we ought not to faint when we are tempted, but, like him, be able to withstand the fiery darts of the devil.

It doubtless appears highly proper, in order that our blessed Lord and Master might both enter upon and prosecute his ministry with more glory to himself and advantage to mankind, that he should previously overcome the most subtle arts of that deceiver, who, under the mask of a serpent, seduced our first parents, and involved them and their posterity in one common ruin.

The peculiar devices used by the old serpent to tempt the Son of God, during the time of his fasting, are not recorded in holy writ, and consequently cannot be ascertained.

But at the expiration of the forty days, when the blessed Jesus had endured the keenest hunger, the tempter, to make proof of the divinity of his mission, insolently demanded, why he bore the sensations of hunger? since, if he was the Son of God, he must have power to change even the stones of that dreary wilderness into bread; and by so marvellous a transmutation, he might have the satisfaction of knowing the truth of what was said concerning him at his baptism.

But our blessed Saviour repelled this device, by citing the words of Moses, which implied, that God,

whenever it seemed good in his sight, could, by extraordinary means, provide for the support of the human race. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God," *Luke*, iv. 4.

Satan being defeated in this effort, took him to the top of a very high mountain, and, thinking to work upon him by another artifice, shewed him a bright view of all the kingdoms of the world, with their alluring glories, promising him universal empire over the whole, if he would bow down and yield to him the honour of the benefaction.

But observe his accursed pride and arrogance, in promising that which is the gift of God alone, universal empire over the earth; and requiring what was due to none but the supreme,—religious homage. This blasphemy, as well as insolence, incited the blessed Jesus to exert his divine authority, and command him, in a peremptory manner, to desist; citing this special injunction from sacred writ, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." Thus repelled, he repeated the attempt, and, having taken our Lord to Jerusalem, placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, and, by a taunt of insolence, urged him to prove the truth of his mission by casting himself down from thence; citing as



The Temptation.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

an encouragement for him to comply with his desire, a text from the Psalms: "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down; for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone," *Matt.* iv. 6. But our Saviour soon baffled this attempt, by another apt quotation from Scripture, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God," *Matt.* iv. 7. Thou shalt not provoke the Lord, either by disobeying his command, or by an impertinent curiosity to know more concerning his mind and will than he is pleased to reveal.

Thus baffled in all his arts and devices, by the wisdom and power of the Son of God, he departed from him, and an host of celestial spirits, despatched from the regions of bliss, came and ministered refreshment to our Saviour, after his victory over the great enemy and deceiver of mankind.

Hence, notwithstanding the ridicule of the infidel, Christians may derive great encouragement to fight manfully against the flesh, the world, and the devil, under the banner of the great Captain of their salvation, who is ever ready to supply them with spiritual armour to sustain the combat with that inve-

terate and subtle foe, whose devices he has experienced, being in every respect tempted like them.

During the time of our Saviour's retirement in the wilderness, his faithful harbinger, the Baptist, being assured, from the miraculous descent of the Holy Spirit, and other concurring testimonies, that Jesus was the promised and long-expected Messiah, continued publishing his mission to the multitude; so that the rulers in Jerusalem received information of the surprising events that had happened in Bethabara, beyond Jordan, before they saw the blessed Jesus, in confirmation of whose mission and doctrine they were effected.

Prompted by curiosity, they despatched a deputation of Priests and Levites to the Baptist, to demand of him who he was; whether he was the Messiah, or Elias; or a prophet risen from the dead, to precede the Messiah, the powerful Prince so earnestly expected by the whole nation of Israel?

The Baptist frankly replied that he was not the Messiah whom they expected: nor Elias, who, as they had vainly thought, would personally appear amongst them; nor any other prophet risen from the dead; but at the same time hinted to them, that though he was not Elias himself, yet he was that person spoken

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

of by the prophet Isaiah, and him of whom he thus prophesied, "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord: make straight in the desert a highway for our God," *Isa.* xl. 3.

The Priests and Levites, not sufficiently gratified with this reply of the Baptist, demanded of him, why he assumed the power of baptizing the people, if he was neither the Messiah, nor Elias, nor any of the ancient prophets risen from the dead? To this demand John answered, I indeed baptize, to show the necessity of repentance; but my baptism is only that of water, and wholly ineffectual in itself to the remission of sins: but that washing foretold by Zacharias, is of most sovereign effect; it is not my province, but solely that of the Messiah, who is actually upon earth and among you, though ye know him not, because he hath not manifested himself unto the world. The Messiah is so far exalted beyond me, in power and dignity, that I am not worthy to do him the meanest offices.

The day after the departure of the Priests and Levites from Bethabara, our blessed Lord left the wilderness, and repaired thither himself, while John was yet baptizing, and preaching the doctrine of repentance.

The Baptist, as his grand business was to direct all persons to the Mes-

siah, for life and salvation in and through him, embraced this seasonable opportunity of pointing him out to the multitude: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" Lest the attending crowd should surmise, that it had been previously concerted between Jesus and John, that the former should assume, and the latter give him, the appellation of Messiah, he publicly and solemnly declared, that he was equally with them ignorant of the pretensions of Jesus to that high character, till he saw the miraculous descent of the Holy Ghost, and heard him pronounced, in the most awful manner, the Son of God. "And John bare record, saying, I saw the spirit descending from Heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record, that this is the Son of God."—*John* i. 32, 33, 34.

The Baptist having made this public declaration, the Messiah left Bethabara, but returned the day following; and John, happening to stand with two of his followers on the bank of the river Jordan, pointed

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

to him as he passed, and in a pious rapture repeated what he had addressed to the multitude on the preceding day, "Behold the Lamb of God!" It is hence imagined, that these two disciples, or followers of the Baptist, were absent at the time of the descent of the Holy Ghost, and for that reason this method was taken of pointing out to them the venerable person of the promised Redeemer of the world.

Animated with an ardent desire of hearing, as well as seeing, this extraordinary person, they left John, and followed Jesus, who, conscious of their design, turned about, and, with the utmost affability, gave them an invitation to the place of his residence. The evangelist John informs us, that one of these disciples was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter; and it is conjectured, from his silence, that himself was the other; for it is remarkable, that in his writings he studiously conceals his own name. Be that as it will, it is abundantly evident, that the testimony of the Baptist, added to the tokens he had from the blessed Jesus, in the course of his converse with him, amply justified Andrew that he was indeed the promised Messiah, the Saviour and Redeemer of lost and perishing sinners.

Andrew soon after found his brother Peter, and brought him to our

blessed Lord, who immediately called him by his name, telling him that he should afterwards be called Cephas, (which signifies a rock,) from his firm resolution of mind, and also because he should contribute towards the foundation of the Christian church.

Some time after, Jesus casually met with Philip, an inhabitant of the town of Bethsaida, and said to him, "Follow me." Philip immediately obeyed the divine command, having heard of the character and mission of our blessed Saviour. It is supposed that this disciple was present at the miraculous descent of the Holy Spirit on our Lord at his baptism; which being admitted, his ready compliance with his call is no matter of admiration.

Philip meeting with Nathanael, an inhabitant of Cana, a town in Galilee, informed him of the actual coming of the long expected Messiah, that great Deliverer of Israel, spoken of by Moses and the ancient prophets; "Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael was assured, from the predictions concerning the Messiah, that he was to be descended from the line of David, and born in the city of Bethlehem, and therefore discovered an amazement at his being called Jesus of Nazareth; "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Can that

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

most contemptible of places, Nazareth, be supposed to have given birth to the mighty Saviour, the Prince of peace, especially as it was expressly foretold by the prophet, that he was to be born in Bethlehem, the city of David?

Nothwithstanding the improbability of such an event, Nathanael listened to Philip, and determined on an examination of the person whom he said was the promised Messiah. Accordingly, under his direction, he repaired to the blessed Jesus, who, knowing his character, saluted him on his approach with this honourable appellation, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!"

Nathanael, amazed at our Lord's pertinent address, as he had never before seen him, asked by what means he obtained such precise knowledge of him? Our Lord replied he had seen him under the fig-tree. Probably Nathanael had been praying under the fig-tree, and had been overheard by our Lord, who, from the substance of his prayer, thus concluded his character; for when the blessed Jesus informed him that he gave him that character on account of what had passed under the fig-tree, Nathanael perceived that he knew not only what passed at a distance, but had access to the inmost thoughts of the heart, a property not allotted to mortals: and therefore

exclaimed with rapture, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel."

Our Saviour then told him, he should hereafter have much stronger testimonials of the divinity of his mission, when he should be eye-witness to what the old patriarch Jacob had before seen in a vision, the angels of heaven descending and ascending, to attend the person, and execute the commands, of the Son of man; an appellation our blessed Lord assumed, not only as considering his humanity, but in order to fulfil most peremptorily that remarkable prediction of the prophet Daniel concerning him; "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." *Dan. vii. 13, 14.*

The great Redeemer, having attested the divinity of his mission by many incontestible evidences, and made five disciples, departed for Galilee, where, soon after his arrival, he was invited, with his mo-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

ther and disciples, to a marriage feast at Cana, a place near Nazareth.

At these nuptials there happened to be a scarcity of wine, and his mother, who interested herself in the conduct of the feast, and was therefore desirous that everything should be done with decorum, applied to her Son, hoping he would be able to remedy the defect.

She had, doubtless, conceived he had the power of working miracles, and was therefore desirous that he would give proof of his ability in the presence of her friends, who were assembled at the marriage.

Addressing herself, therefore, to her Son, she told him, "They have no wine." Our Lord gently reproved her, in these words, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come:" that is, the time or period of my public ministry is not yet arrived; nor is it time for me to display my supernatural powers.

Notwithstanding this mild reproof, his mother still entertained an opinion that he would interest himself in behalf of her and the company, and therefore ordered the servants punctually to obey his commands.

Our blessed Lord, being assured that working a miracle would greatly tend to confirm the faith of his

young disciples, exerted his divine power, by ordering the servants to fill six water-pots, containing each about twenty gallons, with water; which was no sooner done, than the whole was converted into excellent wine.

He then ordered them to draw, and bear to the governor of the feast; who, being ignorant of the miracle that had been wrought, and astonished at the preference of this wine to that which had been served up at the beginning of the feast, addressed himself to the bridegroom, in the hearing of the whole company, telling him that, contrary to the usual custom, he had reserved the best wine to the last; at the same time commending so judicious a practice, as a plain proof of his approbation of his friends present at the entertainment. The bridegroom was equally surprised at the address of the governor of the feast, and the occasion of it, which was effected by the supernatural power of our blessed Lord.

This miracle, which was the first wrought by Jesus, confirmed the faith of his followers, and spread his renown throughout the adjacent country. The votaries of infidelity have not failed to arraign the truth of this event, as well as to vent their sarcastic humour upon it. Their mirth and ridicule seem chiefly

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

founded on a supposition that most of the company were intoxicated, and consequently more liable to delusion ; but we desire them to suspend their opinion, or at least their judgment, a little, while we remind them, that the governor's speech to the bridegroom ("Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse"), does not imply even such a supposition ; but an evident reference to the manner in which the entertainment was conducted, a manner much preferable to that now customarily followed.

Nor can these wise people (in their own conceit) rationally think that Jesus ordered, or expected, that all the wine he had furnished should be expended at this entertainment ; for, according to the Jewish custom on these occasions, it continued a week. Permit us likewise to observe, that there might be a very important reason assigned for our Lord's furnishing such abundance ; because if the quantity had been considerably less, the miracle would have been much less apparent, and the enemies of Christianity, ever ready to grasp at the shadow of a pretence, might have denied that a miracle was wrought at all, it having been easy to convey away a small quantity of water, and substitute the like

quantity of wine in its place ; whereas such a deception must be allowed impracticable in so large a quantity, the transmutation being momentary.

The Deists have likewise made much parade of argument concerning the size of these water-pots. In this we give them their utmost scope, persuaded that all which they can say on that head will not in the least tend to invalidate the Christian cause.

How easily could he, who thus turned water into wine, have transformed every entertainment of a common table into the greatest delicacies, and have regaled himself daily with royal dainties ! But, far superior to such animal gratifications, he chose the severities of a much plainer life. Blessed Jesus ! who can say whether thou art greater in what thou didst, or in what thou didst not do ? May none of us thy followers be too intent in indulging our taste, or any of our other senses ; but, pursuing those intellectual and devotional pleasures which were thy meat and thy drink on earth, may we wait for that good wine which thou reservest for thy people to the last, and for those richer dainties with which thou wilt feast those who shall drink it with thee in thy Father's kingdom !—*Matt. xxvi. 29.*

The blessed Jesus having thus,



Ramleh, with the Hills of Judea.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

by divers means, confirmed the faith of his disciples, and attested the truth and divinity of his mission, among those with whom he had been brought up, departed from Cana, and proceeded towards Jerusalem, in order to keep the approaching passover.

CHAPTER V.

Expulsion of the Profaners of the Temple.—Jesus converses with Nicodemus.—Baptizes in Judea.—Instructs a poor Samaritan.—Heals a sick person at Capernaum.—Returns again to Nazareth, and is expelled thence by his impious Countrymen.

OUR blessed Lord, immediately on his arrival at Jerusalem, repaired to the temple ; where he was not a little shocked at beholding a place dedicated to the solemn service of Almighty God, so prostituted to purposes of fraud and avarice, and become the resort of traitors of every kind. It is evident there must have been a grand market for oxen, sheep, and doves, at such times, for Josephus tells us that no less than 256,000 victims were offered at one Passover.

Such abuse could not long escape his notice or correction, having an absolute right to chastise so flagrant a perversion of a place, that, strictly speaking, was his own. “The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come

to his temple ; even the Messenger of the Covenant, whom ye delight in : behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts.”

Accordingly, the blessed Jesus, whose pious soul was vexed at their profanation of the sacred place, drove out the traders, and overset the tables of the money-changers, saying unto them that sold doves, “Take these things hence : make not my father’s house a house of merchandise.”

These mercenary wretches appear to have been struck at once with a consciousness of their guilt, and the severity of our Lord’s reproof ; as they immediately departed, without making the least resistance. But our Lord’s conduct in this affair, carrying with it every token of zeal, for which the ancient prophets were so remarkable, the council assembled, and determined to inquire by what authority he attempted such a reformation ; requiring, at the same time, a demonstrative proof of the divinity of his commission.

To gratify their curiosity, our blessed Lord referred them only to the miracle of his own resurrection : “Destroy,” says he, probably laying his hand on his breast, “this temple, and I will raise it up in three days.” The rulers, mistaking his meaning, imagined that he referred to the superb and lofty temple finished by Herod, and therefore

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

told him such a relation was highly improbable, nor had they the least reason to think he could possibly rebuild, in three days, that magnificent structure, which had been finished at immense expense, and was the labour of so many years.

Though the blessed Jesus declined compliance with the request of the mighty and noble amongst the inhabitants of Jerusalem, he wrought several miracles in the presence of the common people, in order to confirm the doctrines he delivered, and prove the divinity of his mission.

As there had not been any miracles wrought amongst them for a considerable time, though many were recorded in their sacred books, they beheld our blessed Lord with amazement and veneration; and numbers were satisfied that he was the long-promised Messiah, the desire of all nations, so often foretold by the ancient prophets. For wise reasons, however, he did not publicly discover that he was the "Great Prophet," as he knew that the faith of numbers was yet but weak, and that, consequently, many would desert his cause, when they found he was opposed by the Sanhedrim, or great council of the nation, and did not set up a worldly kingdom, as they thought the expected Messiah was to do. But the

miracles wrought by the holy Jesus did not excite the wonder and astonishment of the common and illiterate class of the people alone.

Nicodemus, a principal person among them, impartially reflecting on his wondrous works, so astonishing in their nature, so demonstrative in their proof, so salutary in their effect, so happily adapted to the confirmation of his doctrines, and so perfectly agreeable to the attributes of the Deity, as well as the predictions of the ancient prophets, concerning the Messiah, "the Son of righteousness, who was to rise with healing in his wings;" was perfectly assured that nothing less than Omnipotence itself could produce such wonders; and thence, like many others of his countrymen, concluded, that Jesus was of a truth sent of God; which last term is the meaning of the word Messiah. But scruples still arose in his mind, when, on the other hand, he considered the obscurity of his birth, and the meanness of his appearance, so different from the exalted notions the people of the Jews always entertained concerning this powerful Prince, who was to erect his throne in the mighty city of Jerusalem, and subject to his dominion all the states and kingdoms of the earth. To obviate, therefore, these scruples, and solve these perplexing doubts, Ni-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Nicodemus resolved on an interview with the blessed Jesus ; but choosing to conceal his visit from the other members of the Sanhedrim, who were greatly averse to his person and doctrine, he chose the night, as most convenient for that purpose.

His salutation of the mighty Redeemer of Israel was this : “ Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God ; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.”—*John* iii. 2.

Rabbi, I am sufficiently convinced that thou art immediately sent as a teacher from on high ; for nothing less than power divine could enable thee to perform the miracles which thou hast wrought in the presence of multitudes. But this salutation by no means implies that Nicodemus thought Jesus the great promised Messiah, even the Redeemer of Israel ; nor could he obtain that knowledge till it was revealed to him by the blessed Spirit of God.

We may observe, that our Saviour, waving all formality and circumlocution, which tend to no real profit, immediately preaches to this noted Rabbi the first great doctrine of Christianity—Regeneration: “ Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nico-

demus, I declare unto thee, as a truth of the last importance : Verily, verily, unless a man be regenerated in the spirit of his mind, have his will and affections transferred from earthly to spiritual objects, he cannot see the kingdom of God, which is holy and spiritual in its nature and enjoyments. This was a mysterious system to the Rabbi, whose religious views extended no farther than rites and ceremonies, and were bounded by time and space ; besides, he thought the very position of our Lord an absurdity in terms. “ How can a man be born when he is old ? can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb, and be born ? ” Our Lord replies to this question, “ Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” The regeneration which I preach is not of a natural, but of a spiritual nature ; for, unless as great a change be wrought on the soul of a man by the Holy Spirit, as passed upon his body when he was born into the world, he cannot see the kingdom of God, in such a way as to secure an interest in its invaluable blessings, nor be an heir of divine glory, which consists not in earthly splendour and the gratification of the meaner passions, but in an exemption from whatever is earthly, sensual, and devilish, and the prosecu-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

tion of whatever is heavenly, holy, and spiritual. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." It is a truth that you are all concerned in, that you yourselves, even though you are Jews and Pharisees, and rulers of the people—ye must be born again; since the degeneracy of the human nature is common to all. You must undergo a spiritual regeneration, a renovation of the heart, which changes the whole man, and fits you for the participation of heavenly blessedness.

This important work is likewise spiritual in its operation, unseen by mortal eyes, being wrought on the heart of man by the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit, which changes his nature, and, with respect to eternal things, makes him another, a new creature. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

Notwithstanding this explanation of the blessed Jesus, Nicodemus was so prepossessed with partiality towards the Jews, who on account of their alliance to Abraham thought they were the people of God, entitled to heaven, and consequently in

no need of this new operation of the mind called regeneration, that he again demanded, "How can these things be?" The divine Instructor then reproves his dulness and misapprehension of what he had so clearly explained and propounded to him, especially as he was himself a teacher of the people, and one of the great council of the nation: "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?" The doctrines I deliver are not fiction and mere surmise, but founded on eternal truth, immediately revealed from God, and consistent with the will of heaven. I am witness to the same, and therefore affirm that such testimony is sufficient to render them valid. But your prejudices still prevail, nor can your unbelief be conquered by all the arguments I can advance. "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness."

If ye thus reject the first principles of the Christian religion, such as the necessity of regeneration, or the influence of the Spirit of God upon the heart of man, how will ye believe the sublimer truths I shall hereafter deliver concerning the kingdom of God, or state of the saints in glory? If I inform you of spiritual transactions in this lower world, and ye believe not; how can ye believe if I tell you of those things

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

which relate solely to another and heavenly state? But to confirm your belief in what I have delivered, know, that my assured knowledge of these things is derived from the Father of light, the God of truth, by whom I am vested with gifts superior to any of the ancient prophets.

No man has ascended the regions of immortality, and descended from thence, but “the Son of man;” consequently, no man but “the Son of man” can, with truth and certainty, reveal the immediate will of the Father who is in heaven. Your great law-giver, Moses, ascended not there; Mount Sinai was the summit of his elevation; whereas, the Son of man, who was in heaven, and came down from thence with a divine commission to sinful mortals, had the most clear and convincing proofs of the will of his almighty Father, penetrated into the designs of infinite wisdom and grace, and consequently must be higher than any prophet, being in a peculiar sense the Prophet of the most high God, or Angel of his presence.

The divine preacher, who spake as no man ever spake, likewise labours to eradicate the favourite principle of the Jews, I mean, that of confining all blessings, temporal and eternal, to their own nation and people; as well as to shew the

vanity of their expecting the appearance of the Messiah in pomp and magnificence.

To effect this glorious design, he lays open to the Rabbi, that it was agreeable both to the doctrines of Moses, as well as the will of God, that the Redeemer, in this state of mortality, should be exposed to poverty and distress of every kind; that his conquests were not to be of a temporal nature, but over the hearts and wills of men; that his throne was not to be established in the earthly, but heavenly Jerusalem; previous to which he was to shed his blood, as, by virtue of the same, all of every nation and kingdom throughout the earth, might pass into the heavenly world, and there, for ever, provided they relied on his merits, and conformed their lives to the doctrines he preached, enjoy that perfection of bliss, which, through his sufferings, was provided for them, by God himself, to all eternity.

Let us remember, therefore, that it is not enough that a new name be given, or that a new profession be assumed; it is not enough that we are descended from the most pious ancestors, that we have been externally devoted to God by the early seal of his covenant, or that we openly have made a solemn and express profession of our own faith and obedience, and have been born

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

of baptismal water in our riper years ; there must be a new nature implanted, a new creation formed in our souls by the almighty energy of the eternal Spirit, or it had been better for us that we had never been born at all.

That God Almighty, the Father, out of his unsupplicated, unmerited, grace and mercy to the sinful race of men, sent his only begotten Son to purchase eternal life, through the effusion of his own blood, for all of every nation and kingdom throughout the earth, who should believe in him ; that is, who should believe in the divinity of his mission, the efficacy of his atonement, and, in consequence of that faith, conform to the rules of his gospel. "Only let your conversation be as becometh the gospel of Christ." Condemnation, justly passed on all transgressors of the law of God (which are all mankind), can alone be averted according to the divine institution, the propriety of which it is the height of impiety and presumption to call in question. By faith in the blessed Jesus, such a faith as we have just explained, "he that believeth on him is not condemned ; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

It appears, from the future con-

duct of Nicodemus, that, instead of supposing Jesus to be only "a teacher come from God," he was fully convinced that he was the "Messiah, the Redeemer of Israel:" for he afterwards constantly espoused his cause in the great council of the nation ; and when his countrymen put him to an ignominious death, he, together with Joseph of Arimathea, buried him, when all others had forsaken him.

The time of the passover at Jerusalem being expired, Jesus, together with his disciples, withdrew into the remote parts of Judea, where he continued a considerable time, preaching the kingdom of God, and baptizing the new converts. John the Baptist being also, at the same time, baptizing in the river Enon, a dispute arose between his disciples and certain Jews, concerning the preference of the baptism of Jesus.

Being unable to decide the point, they referred it to the opinion of John ; on which the pious Baptist immediately declared, that he was only the harbinger of the great Messiah, who baptized not only with water, but with the Holy Spirit ; adding, that his own ministry was on the decline, as the beauty of the morning-star, the harbinger of the sun, decreases, when that fountain of light but dawns in the chambers of the east.



Christ and the Woman of Samaria.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The Baptist likewise mentioned to his disciples and hearers many circumstances tending to prove the divinity of the mission of the holy Jesus, and the important design of his incarnation. "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life, but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

The Baptist, having publicly preached the great doctrine of salvation through faith in Jesus, departed from the wilderness of Judea, where he had continued a considerable time, and went into Galilee, often repairing to the court of Herod, who esteemed, or affected to esteem, both his preaching and person. But John, being faithful in his ministry, could not fail to remonstrate on the injustice and impiety of a known practice of Herod, which was his cohabiting with Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; and thereby incurring the displeasure of that ambitious woman, he was, at her instance, cast into prison, and there reserved for future destruction.

Whilst these things happened in Galilee, our blessed Lord continued preaching in the wilderness, whither great numbers resorted, attracted by curiosity, to see the miracles which fame reported he daily wrought. The success of his ministry exciting the envy of the hypocritical tribe of

Pharisees, our blessed Lord thought proper to retire into Galilee, in order to promote the design of his mission in those parts.

In the course of his journey, being weary with travelling in so warm a country, and excessively thirsty, he sat down in Samaria by a celebrated well, given by the old patriarch Jacob to his son Joseph, while his disciples were gone to the city to procure provisions.

While the humble Jesus was sitting by the well-side, a woman, a native of the country, came with her pitcher to fetch water; and our Lord requested of her to give him to drink. The appearance of Jesus astonished the woman, because she knew him to be a Jew; and the Samaritans were held in the utmost contempt by those people, who, indeed, arrogated a preference to all nations upon earth. But though she knew him to be a Jew, she knew not that he was the son of God, full of grace and truth, divested of human prejudices, and the very essence of humility and every virtue. As the design of his mission and incarnation was to promote the real happiness of mankind, he embraced every opportunity of enforcing his salutary doctrines; and, therefore, though his thirst was extreme, he delayed its gratification, in order to inform this woman, though of an infamous

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

character, of the means by which she might obtain living water, or, in other words, eternal life. As the best method to effect this purpose, he gave her to understand, that had she known the character of the suppliant, she would have eagerly satisfied his desire, and been retaliated by a gift the most invaluable, even living water, issuing from the well of eternal salvation.

The woman taking his words in the common acceptation, imagining that he suggested his power of supplying her with water flowing from a perpetual spring, which, in that parched climate, appeared impossible, demanded of him if he was vested with a power superior to their father Jacob, who dug this well, drank out of it with his family, and left it for the benefit of posterity.

The Saviour and friend of mankind, still benign in his purpose towards this poor sinner, replied, "That all who drank of the water of Jacob's well would thirst again, being but a temporary allay of a desire incident to human nature; whereas those who drank of the water which he was ready to dispense, should never thirst; because that water flowed from the inexhaustible Fountain of Divine Grace, and could not be drained but with immensity itself."

Though this great Preacher of Israel, by a simple and natural alle-

gory, displayed the power of divine grace, the woman, ignorant of the allusion and meaning of the blessed Jesus, desired of him that water, that she might not thirst in future, nor have occasion to come to Jacob's well daily for water.

To shew her the nature of sin, and thereby create in her soul desires after the waters of life, the blessed Jesus, by some pertinent questions and replies, evinced his knowledge of her infamous course of life, and by that means convinced her that he acted under an influence more than human. To evade, however, the present subject of discourse, which filled her with a degree of awe and fear, she proposed to his discussion a case long warmly contested between the Jews and Samaritans: Whether mount Gerizim, or the city of Jerusalem, was destined by God as the place peculiarly set apart for religious worship? Our blessed Lord replied to this insignificant question, that it was not the place, but the manner, in which adoration was offered to the Father of spirits, that rendered such worship acceptable; observing, that "God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."—*John* iv. 24.

In consequence of this reply to her, which apparently referred to things spiritual and eternal, she in-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

formed the blessed Jesus of her expectation of the arrival of the promised Messiah, who should punctually inform them concerning these points, so long undecisively contested.

Our Lord, embracing the opportunity of preaching himself to this poor woman as the Saviour of sinners, replied without hesitation, "I that speak unto thee am he."

While Jesus continued talking with the woman, his disciples returned, and approached him at the very time when he told the woman that he was the Messiah. Though they were astonished at his condescension in conversing with an inhabitant of Samaria, and even of instructing her in the doctrines of religion, none presumed to ask him why he conversed with one who was an enemy to the Jews, and the worship in the temple of Jerusalem. But the woman hearing Jesus call himself the Messiah, left her pitcher, and ran into the city to publish the glad tidings, That the great Deliverer of mankind was then sitting by the well of Jacob, and had told her all the secret transactions of her life. This report astonished the Samaritans, and, at the same time, roused their curiosity to see a person foretold by Moses and the prophets, and of whose appearance there was then so universal an expectation.

The disciples, on their return, set before their Master the provision they had purchased; but he, wholly absorbed in meditation, refused the refreshment so highly requisite, telling them he had "meat to eat that they knew nothing of." This unexpected answer surprised his disciples, who, understanding his words in their natural sense, asked one another, whether any person had, during their absence, supplied him with provisions? But Jesus soon explained the mystery, by telling them that he did not mean natural, but spiritual food; that to execute the commission he had received from his Father, was far better to him than meat or drink; and the satisfaction he was going to receive from the conversion of the Samaritans, much greater than any sensual enjoyments.

Many of the Samaritans were now near Jesus, who, lifting up his eyes, and seeing the ways crowded with people coming to him from the city, stretched out his benevolent hands towards them, and addressed his disciples in the following manner: "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.—" *John* iv. 35. Behold yonder multitudes, how they are thronging to hear the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

word, which has only a few minutes been sown in their hearts! It is not, therefore, always necessary to wait with patience for the effect; for it sometimes immediately follows the cause. To gather this spiritual harvest, and finish the work of Him that sent me, is my proper food: adding, for the encouragement of his disciples, As you have laboured with me in this harvest of souls, so shall you participate in the great recompense of eternal rewards. "He that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal; that both he that soweth, and he that reapeth, may rejoice together." —*John* iv. 36.

Many of the people had been so affected at the words of the woman, that they were fully persuaded Jesus could be no other than the great Messiah; accordingly their first request was that he would deign to take up his residence in their city. The compassionate Redeemer of the human race so far complied, as to stay with them two days, an interval which he spent in preaching to them the kingdom of God; so that the greatest part of the city embraced the doctrine of the gospel, and at his departure said unto the woman, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard him ourselves, and know that he is indeed the Christ,

the Saviour of the world." —*John* iv. 42.

Having accomplished his gracious design in Samaria, Jesus continued his journey to Galilee, to exercise his ministry, and preach there the kingdom of God; telling his disciples, that the time was now accomplished which had been predetermined by Omnipotence, for erecting the happy kingdom of the Prince of Peace.

Our Lord had performed several miracles at Jerusalem during the passover, at which the inhabitants of Galilee were present. His preaching was, therefore, at first attended with great success, for they listened attentively to his doctrine, and received it with particular kindness and courtesy; especially the people of Cana, where he had turned the water into wine.

During his residence in that city, a nobleman of Capernaum came to him, requesting, with great humility and reverence, that he would come down and heal his son, who was at the point of death. Our blessed Saviour readily complied with the latter part of this request; but, to remove a prejudice they had conceived, that it was necessary to be personally present in order to restore the sick person to health, he refused to go down to Capernaum, dismissing the father with this assu-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

rance, that his son was restored to health: "Go thy way, thy son liveth."—*John* iv. 50. The nobleman obeyed the word of Jesus, and immediately departed for his own house; but before his arrival he was met by his servants, with the joyful news that his son was recovered. On this the father inquired at what time they perceived an alteration for the better? and from their answer was satisfied, that immediately after the words were spoken by the blessed Jesus, the fever left him, and he was recovered in a miraculous manner. This amazing instance of his power and goodness abundantly convinced the nobleman and his family, that Jesus was the true Messiah, the great Prophet so long promised to the world.

After some stay in the city and neighbourhood of Cana, Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had spent the greatest part of his youth, and, as his constant custom was, went to the synagogue on the Sabbath-day, and read that celebrated prediction of the Messiah in the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that are bruised; to preach the ac-

ceptable year of the Lord."—*Luke* iv. 18, 19.

It should be remembered, that our blessed Saviour read this passage in the original Hebrew, which was then a dead language; and, as he had never been taught letters, could do it only by inspiration from above. But he did more; he explained the passage with such strength of reason, and beauty of expression, that the inhabitants of Nazareth, who well knew he had never been initiated into the rudiments of learning, heard him with astonishment. But as he performed no miracle in their city, they were offended at him. Perhaps they thought the place of his residence should have been his peculiar care, and, as he could, with a single word, heal the sick at a distance, not a single person in Nazareth should have been afflicted with any kind of disease. That they really entertained sentiments of this kind, seems plain from our Saviour's own words: "Ye will surely say to me, Physician heal thyself; whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country;"—evidently alluding to the great and benevolent miracle he had wrought on the nobleman's son.

But the holy Jesus, by enumerating the miracles Elijah had done in behalf of the widow of Sarepta,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

who was a heathen ; and the inhabitants of an idolatrous city, in the time of famine, when many widows in Israel perished with hunger ; and of Naaman the Syrian, who was cured of his leprosy by the prophet Elisha, when numbers of Jews, afflicted with the same loathsome disease, were suffered to continue in their uncleanness, sufficiently proved that the prophets had, on some extraordinary occasions, wrought miracles in favour of those whom the Israelites, from a fond conceit of their being the peculiar favourites of Heaven, judged unworthy of such marks of particular favour. The council was so incensed at this reply, that, forgetting the sanctity of the Sabbath, they hurried him through the streets, to the brow of the hill whereon the city was built, intending to cast him headlong down the precipice : but the Son defeated their cruel intentions, by miraculously confounding their sight, and withdrawing from the fury of these wretched people.

CHAPTER VI.

Our Lord proceeds to Capernaum.—Adds to the Number of his Followers.—Proclaims the Gospel in Galilee.—Preaches to a numerous Audience his well-known and excellent discourse upon the Mount.

THE holy Jesus, aggrieved by the cruel Nazarenes, departed from

them, and visited Capernaum, the capital of Galilee (being built on the borders of the Lake of Genesaret), which was a place highly convenient for the design ; for, besides the numerous inhabitants of that city, the trading towns on the lake were crowded with strangers, who, after hearing the doctrine of the gospel preached by the great Redeemer of mankind, would not fail to spread, in their respective countries, the happy tidings of salvation.

Though it was expedient that he should spend a considerable time in preaching and working miracles, to confirm his mission, and instruct his disciples in the doctrine they were afterwards to publish to the whole world, this could not be done at Jerusalem, the residence of the Scribes and Pharisees, whose ambition would never have suffered so celebrated a teacher as Jesus to reside among them ; these countries were, therefore, the only places where he could, for any time, take up his residence, and instruct the people in such a manner as to answer the great intention of his coming into the world.

If any should inquire, why he chose Capernaum in preference to all the other places situated on the Lake of Genesaret ? we reply, Because he was certain of being favour-



The Sea of Tiberias

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

ably received by the inhabitants of that city. He had gained the friendship of the principal family, by restoring to health a favourite child, who, to all human appearance, was just sinking into the chambers of the grave. Nor was this family the only friends he had in that city; so stupendous a miracle could not fail of procuring the love and esteem of all the relations of that noble family: besides, so benevolent and surprising a miracle must have greatly conciliated the respect of all the inhabitants of Capernaum, who could not be ignorant of so remarkable an event. And, accordingly, our Saviour spent here, and in other places bordering on the lake, a great part of the time of his public life; so that the inhabitants of these parts enjoyed a considerable share of the blessed company, and divine instructions, of the Son of God.

It may not be amiss, in this place, to give a short description of this celebrated lake, called in the Old Testament, the Sea of Chinneroth; but in the New it has three different appellations, being called the Sea of Galilee, from the province of Galilee in general; the Sea of Tiberias, from a city of that name on its western shore; and the Lake of Gennesaret, from a particular tract of Galilee, extending a considerable way along its western side.

According to Josephus, it is a hundred furlongs in length, and forty in breadth. The bottom is of gravel, which renders the waters both of a good colour and taste. It is softer than either fountain or river water; and at the same time so cold, that it will not grow warm, though exposed to the rays of the sun in the very hottest season of the year. The river Jordan runs through the midst of it, which stocks it with a variety of fish, of a peculiar form and flavour, not found in any other place.

The countries surrounding this lake were large, fertile, and populous, especially the two Galilees, which, according to Josephus, had a great many towns, and a multitude of villages, the least of which contained fifteen hundred souls. On the east side were the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, Gadara, and Hippon; on the west, Capernaum, Tiberias, and Tarichea. And, from all these advantages, it was a common saying among the Jews, that God loved the Sea of Galilee above all other seas. An observation strictly just, if to those we add its greatest advantage, namely, that this sea, above all others, was frequently honoured with the divine presence of the great Redeemer of mankind, while he dwelt at Capernaum, and even once after he rose from the dead.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

While Jesus tarried at Capernaum, he usually taught in the synagogues on the Sabbath-day, preaching with such energy of power as greatly astonished the whole congregation. He did not, however, constantly confine himself to that city; the adjacent country was often blessed with his presence, and cheered with the heavenly words of his mouth.

In one of the neighbouring villages, he called Simon and Andrew, who were following their occupation of fishing on the lake, to accompany him. These disciples, who had before been acquainted with him, readily obeyed the heavenly mandate, and followed the Saviour of the world. Soon after, he saw James and John, who were also fishing on the lake, and called them also. Nor did they hesitate to follow the great Redeemer of mankind, and, from their ready compliance, there is reason to believe that they, as well as Simon and Andrew, were acquainted with Jesus at Jordan; unless we suppose, which is far from being improbable, that their readiness proceeded from the secret energy of his power upon their minds. But however this be, the four disciples accompanied our blessed Saviour at Capernaum, and soon after to different parts of Galilee

How long our Lord was on his journey cannot be determined; all the evangelists have mentioned is, that he wrought a great number of miracles on diseased persons; and that the fame of these wonderful works drew people from Galilee, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond Jordan. Nor was the knowledge of these miracles concealed from the heathens, particularly the inhabitants of Syria; for they also brought their sick to Galilee to be healed by him. Consequently, the time our blessed Saviour spent in these tours must have been considerable, though the evangelists have said very little concerning it.

But whatever time was spent in these benevolent actions, the prodigious multitudes which flocked to him from every quarter moved his compassion towards those who were bewildered in the darkness of ignorance, and determined him to preach to them the words of eternal life.

For this blessed purpose, he ascended a mountain in that neighbourhood; and placing himself on an eminence, from whence he could be heard by throngs of people attending him, he inculcated, in an amazingly pathetic manner, the most important points of religion. But, alas! they were coldly received, because many of them were directly

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

opposite to the standing precepts delivered by the Scribes and Pharisees. Surely these people, who had seen the blessed Jesus perform so many benevolent actions to the poor, the diseased, and the maimed, might have entertained a more favourable opinion of his doctrine, and known that so compassionate and powerful a person must have been actuated by the Spirit of God, and, consequently, that the doctrine he taught was really divine.

He opened his excellent sermon with the doctrine of happiness, a subject which the teachers of wisdom have always considered as the principal object in morals, and employed their utmost abilities to convey a clear idea of it to their disciples, but differed very remarkably with regard to the particulars in which it consisted. The Jews were, in general, persuaded that the enjoyments of sense were the sovereign good. Riches, conquest, liberty, mirth, fame, revenge, and other things of the same kind, afforded them such pleasures, that they wished for no better in the Messiah's kingdom, which they all considered as a secular one; and that a golden, instead of a sceptre of righteousness, would have been the sceptre of his kingdom. Nay, some of the disciples themselves retained, for a time, the like kind

of notion, till they were convinced of their mistake, by the spirit, word, and conduct of their divine Master.

Our Lord and Master, therefore, to shew his hearers in general, and his disciples in particular, the grossness of their error, declared that the highest happiness of man consisted in the favour and image of God; that these will make a man unspeakably happy even in tribulation and persecution. In possessing these, the soul has peace and joy, and a lively hope of eternal rest; without these, no situation, however pleasant, no wealth, however abundant, no station, however exalted, can afford any solid or permanent satisfaction of mind. He therefore addressed them in the following, or similar manner: You congratulate the rich and the great, but "happy are the poor in spirit," those humble souls that, deeply conscious of their ignorance and guilt, can quietly yield to Divine teachings and Divine disposals: for however they may be despised and trampled on by men, theirs is the kingdom of heaven. You admire the gay and jovial part of mankind, and please yourselves with the hopes of joy and festivity; but I say unto you, Happy are they that now mourn under a penitent sense of their sins, for they shall ere long

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

be comforted with the discoveries of God's forgiving love, and be cheered with the reviving rays of his everlasting favour.

The truth of this heavenly aphorism is very evident; for what has so great a power to turn the feet of the sons of men into the path of virtue, as sanctified affliction? Has it not a natural tendency to give mankind a distaste of the pleasures of the world, and convince them they are nothing more than vanity and vexation of spirit; and, consequently, to demonstrate that they must seek for happiness in things more solid and permanent than any in this vale of tears? The Holy Spirit then awakens the most serious thoughts in the mind; composes it into a grave and settled frame, very different from the levity inspired by prosperity; gives it a fellow-feeling of the sorrows of others; and makes it thoroughly sensible of the danger of departing from God, the source and centre of all its joys.

Nor are the passionate happy; but, on the contrary, the meek; those who have, by the grace of God, subdued their tempers, can patiently bear provocation, and are strangers to that destructive passion, envy. The meek shall inherit the choicest blessings of the present life; for, indeed, they principally

flow from that benevolent and heavenly temper of mind. Meekness consists in the moderation of our passions, which renders a person lovely and venerable in the eyes of his fellow-mortals; and thence he possesses the sincere esteem of the upright; while the passionate and envious man is considered as despicable, though adorned with the robe of honour, and dignified with the most ample possessions. "Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth."

Men, through vanity and blindness, consider those as happy who enjoy the pleasures of this life, by rioting in luxury and excess. But this is far from being the case; on the contrary, those are the truly happy who have the most vehement desire after the salvation of God, and enjoy much of his love. For they, by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, shall obtain every thing they desire; shall be happy here in the practice of righteousness; and, after this transitory life is ended, shall be received into the blissful mansions of the heavenly Canaan. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled."

Forgiveness, not resentment, for injuries done, is a real spring of happiness; and those who are of a humane and beneficent disposition,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

rejoice when they can perform a benevolent action, especially to their fellow mortals in distress. The merciful shall see themselves recompensed even in this life: for they shall find, after many days, the bread they have cast upon the waters of affliction returning ten-fold into their bosoms. And surely nothing can surpass the pleasure felt by a generous mind at having relieved a brother, when pressed beneath a load of misfortunes; the pleasure is god-like; it is divine. "Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy."

Permanent delight is totally inconsistent with sensuality, which is a subjection to the appetite; it is the portion of those who have mortified their carnal appetites, to enjoy an inward purity of mind. With what delight do we behold the glories of the sun, and contemplate the beautiful scenes of nature that surround us! But what proportion has this to the ineffable delights that must fill the minds of those who behold the great Creator himself, who called the whole universe from nothing, and still supports it with the word of his power? "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God."

The tyrants and conquerors of earth, who disturb the peace of mankind, are far from being happy; it

falls to the share of those who love their fellow-creatures, and do all in their power to promote peace and harmony among the children of men. For they imitate the perfection of their Maker, and therefore will be acknowledged by him for his children, and participate of his happiness. "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."

Nor does happiness consist in liberty and ease, if those privileges are purchased at the expense of truth and righteousness. Those who have suffered the severest trial that human nature is capable of sustaining, from purity of heart and for conscience sake, shall be honoured with the highest reward in the blissful mansions of eternity. "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Contentment is not to be expected from the applause of the world; but will be the portion of those who are falsely reviled for righteousness' sake, and share in the affronts offered to God himself, if they suffer in a Christian spirit; for by these persecutions the prophets of all ages have been distinguished. "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you, falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceed

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

ing glad; for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”
—*Matt. v. 11, 12.*

These are the declarations, with regard to happiness, made by the Son of God: and surely we may believe words of him who came down from heaven; and who, in compassion to our infirmities, took upon himself our nature, and, to redeem us from the power of sin and death, offered himself a sacrifice on the cross, and thereby opened to us the gates of eternal life.

Having shown in what true happiness consisted, our Saviour addressed himself to his disciples, and explained their duty, as the teachers appointed to conduct others in the paths that lead to eternal felicity; and excited them to diligence in dispensing the salutary influences of their doctrine and example, that their hearers might honour and praise the great Creator of heaven and earth, who had been so kind to the children of men.

As his definition of happiness was very different from what the Jews were accustomed to hear from the Scribes and Pharisees, he thought proper to declare, that he was not come to destroy the moral precepts contained in the law or the prophets, but to fulfil or confirm them.

Nothing is so steadfast as the eter-

nal truths of morality: the heavens may pass away, and the whole frame of nature be dissolved, but the rule of righteousness shall remain immutable and immortal. And, therefore, he ordered his disciples, on the severest penalties, to enforce, both by preaching and example, the strict observation of all the moral precepts contained in the sacred writings, and that in a much greater latitude than they were taken by the teachers of Israel. And, in consideration of the frailties of human nature, taught them that excellent form of prayer which has been used by Christians of most denominations to this very day:

“Our Father,” &c.

If earthly parents are called fathers, the Almighty has the best title from every creature, and particularly from men, being the Father of their spirits, the former of their bodies, and the continual preserver of both. Nor is this all; he is our father in a still higher sense, as he regenerates us, and stamps his image upon our minds; so that, partaking of his nature, we become his children, and therefore we can with a holy boldness call him by the title of that relation. In the former sense, God is the father of all his creatures, whether good or bad; but in the latter, he is the father only of the righteous. Father is the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

most magnificent title invented by philosophers or poets, in honour of their gods ; it conveys the most lovely idea possible to be conceived by the human breast. As it is used by mankind in general, it marks the essential character of the true God, namely, that he is the first cause of all things, or the author of their being ; and, at the same time, conveys a strong idea of the tender love he bears to his creatures, whom he nourishes with an affection, and protects with a watchfulness, infinitely superior to that of an earthly parent. The name of Father also teaches us, that we owe our being to God, points out his goodness and mercy in upholding us, and expresses his power in giving us the things we ask. Nor is this all ; we are likewise taught to give our Maker the title of Father, that our sense of the tender relation in which he stands to us may be confirmed ; our faith in his power and goodness strengthened ; our hopes of obtaining what we ask in prayer cherished ; and our desire of obeying and imitating him quickened ; for reason aided by grace teaches us, that it is disgraceful in children to degenerate from their parents, and that they cannot commit a greater crime than to disobey the commands of an indulgent father.

Lastly, we are commanded to call him Father in the plural number

(and that even in our secret addresses to the throne of grace), to put us in mind that we are all brethren, the children of one common parent ; and that we ought to love one another with sincerity, as we pray not for ourselves only, but for all the human race.

“ Which art in heaven.” These words do not suppose the presence of God to be confined ; he is present everywhere ; is about our paths, and about our bed, and narrowly inspecteth every action of the sons of men. But they express his majesty and power, and distinguish him from those we call fathers upon earth, and from false gods, which are not in heaven, the happy mansions of bliss and felicity ; where the Almighty, who is essentially present in every part of the universe, gives more especial manifestations of his presence to such of his creatures as he hath exalted to share with him in the eternal felicities of the heavenly Jerusalem.

“ Hallowed be thy name.” By the Name of God, the Hebrews understood God himself, his attributes, and his works ; and therefore the meaning of the petition is, May thy existence be universally believed, thy presence loved and imitated, thy works admired, thy supremacy over all things acknowledged, thy providence revered and confided in ! May all the sons of men think so highly

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

of his divine majesty, of his attributes, of his works ; and may we so express our veneration for God, that his glory may be manifested in every corner of the world !

“Thy kingdom come.” Let the kingdom of ^{the} Messiah be extended to the utmost parts of the earth, that all the children of men “may know his salvation, and become one fold under one shepherd, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

“Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.”

May thy will, O thou great Father of the universe, be done in us, that by the light of thy glorious gospel, and the aid of thy Holy Spirit, we may be enabled to imitate the angels of light, by giving as sincere, universal, and constant obedience to thy divine commands, as those blessed beings do in glory.

“Give us this day our daily bread.” Give us from time to time wholesome and proper food, that we may be enabled to worship thee with cheerfulness and vigour.

“And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” The Almighty, as supreme governor of the universe, has a right to support his government, by punishing those who transgress his laws. The suffering of punishment, therefore, is a debt which sinners owe to the divine justice; so that when we ask God in prayer to

forgive our debts, we beg that he would be mercifully pleased to remit the punishment of all our sins, particularly the pains of hell ; and that, laying aside his displeasure, he would receive us into favour, and bless us with life eternal. In this petition, therefore, we confess our sins, and express the sense we have of their guilt ; namely, that they deserve death : and sure nothing can be more proper than such a confession in our addresses to God ; because humility, and a sense of our own unworthiness, when we ask favours of the Almighty, whether spiritual or temporal, have a tendency to give us a proper sense of the goodness of God in bestowing them upon us.

The terms of this petition are worthy of our notice : “Forgive us only as we forgive.” We must forgive others, if we hope ourselves to be forgiven, and are permitted to crave from God such forgiveness only as we grant to others ; so that if we do not forgive even our enemies, we seriously and solemnly implore the Almighty to condemn us to the punishment of eternal death. How remarkably careful, therefore, should men be to have their hearts purged from all rancour and malice, before they venture into the temple of the Almighty, to offer up their prayers to the throne of grace !

“And lead us not into temptation,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

but deliver us from evil." Whenever we are tempted, O Thou, that helpest our infirmities, suffer us not to "enter into temptation," to be overcome, or suffer loss thereby; but make a way for us to escape, so that we may be more than conquerors, through thy love, over sin, and all the consequences of it. "But deliver us," by some means, from the evil; either by removing the temptation, or increasing our strength to resist it. This petition teaches us to preserve a sense of our own inability to repel and overcome the solicitations of the world, and of the necessity there is of our receiving assistance from above, both to regulate our passions and enable us to prosecute a religious life.

"For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever." Because the government of the universe is thine for ever, and thou alone possessest the power of creating and upholding all things; and because the glory of thine infinite perfections remains eternally with thee; therefore all men ought to hallow thy name, submit themselves to thy government, and perform thy will. And in an humble sense of their dependence, seek from thee the supply of their wants, the pardon of their sins, and the kind protection of thy providence.

This is emphatically called the Lord's Prayer, because delivered by the Son of God himself; and, therefore, we should do well to understand it thoroughly, that, when we enter the temple of the Lord, and address him in solemn prayer, we may have hopes that he will grant our petitions. And, above all, not to harbour in our breasts the least envy or malice against any who may have offended us; for it is only on a supposition that we have forgiven others, that we may have the least reason to hope for obtaining forgiveness from the great Creator.

The divine Preacher proceeded to consider the great duty of fasting, in which he directed them not to follow the hypocrites, in disfiguring their faces, and in clothing themselves in the melancholy weeds of sorrow, but to be chiefly solicitous to appear before God as one that truly fasteth. Then will the Almighty, who constantly surrounds us, and is acquainted even with the most secret thoughts of our hearts, openly bestow upon us the blessings which he hath promised to a true penitent, whose mortification, contrition, and humility, he can discern without the external appearances of sorrow and repentance. It must, however, be remembered, that our blessed Saviour is here speaking of private fasting, and to this alone his

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

directions are to be applied ; for when we are called upon to mourn over public sins or calamities, it ought to be performed in the most public manner.

Heavenly-mindedness was the next thing inculcated by the blessed Jesus ; and this he recommended with a peculiar earnestness, because the Jewish doctors were, in general, strangers to this grace, in which he was desirous his followers should be clothed, as being the most excellent ornament for a teacher of righteousness. This is strenuously recommended by our blessed Saviour, by shewing the deformity of its opposite, covetousness, which has only perishable things for its object. “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”—*Matt.* vi. 19, 20, 21.

More solid happiness will accrue from depositing your treasures in heaven, than in laying them up on earth, where they are subject to a thousand disasters ; and even, at best, can remain for only a short series of years ; whereas, those laid up in heaven are permanent, subject

to no accident, and will lead to a “crown of glory that fadeth not away, eternal in the heavens.” Nor let any man be so foolish as to think he can place his heart on the happiness of a future life, when his treasures are deposited in this vale of misery ; for wherever are laid up the goods which his soul desireth, there his heart and affections will also remain. If, therefore, you are desirous of sharing in the joys of eternity, you must lay up your treasures in the “mansions of my Father’s kingdom.”

Lest they should imagine it was possible to be both heavenly-minded and covetous at the same time, he assured them that this was full as absurd as to imagine that a person could, at the same time, serve two masters of opposite characters. “No man can serve two masters : for either he will hate the one, and love the other ; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” *Matt.* vi. 24.

To strengthen this doctrine, he added a few plain and evident instances of the power, perfection, and extent, of God’s providence, in which his tender care for the least and weakest of his creatures shines with a remarkable lustre ; demonstrating the wise and paternal attention of the Deity to all the crea-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

tures of his hand. He desired them to observe the birds of the air, the lilies, and even the grass of the field: leading his most illiterate hearers to form a more elevated and extensive idea of the Divine government than the philosophers had attained; who, though they allowed in general that the world was governed by God, had very confused notions of his providence with regard to every individual creature and action. He taught them, that the almighty Father of the whole was the guardian and protector of every being in the universe; that every action is subject to his will, and nothing left to the blind determination of chance.

And if our lives be according to the Divine will, we have surely no reason to be anxious about the necessities of life. "Behold," says the blessed Jesus, "the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?"—*Matt.* vi. 26. Are not the fowls of the air, who have no concern for future wants, fed and nourished by the beneficent hand of your heavenly Father? and can ye think that man shall be destitute of his tender care? "And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not,

neither do they spin. And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these."—*Matt.* vi. 28, 29. Consider the lilies that so finely adorn the adjacent fields; how beautiful their form! how lively their colours! how fragrant their scent! the productions of art but faintly imitate them. Even Solomon himself, in his splendid robes of royalty, was but meanly adorned in comparison of these. And surely, if Omnipotence thus beautifully clothe the various productions of the fields, whose duration is remarkably transient and uncertain, you have not the least reason to doubt but he will bless your honest endeavours, and send you proper clothing; are ye not of infinitely more value than they? Be ye solicitous to obtain the happiness of the life to come; and all the good things of this life shall in the course of divine providence be added unto you.

Our Lord then prohibited all rash and uncharitable censure, either with regard to the characters of others in general, or their actions in particular; lest, in doing so, both God and man resent the injury. If you judge charitably, says the meek and benevolent Redeemer of the human race, and are ready to pity and pardon their faults, both your

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

heavenly Father, and man, will deal with you after the same manner. But if you always put the harshest construction on every action, and are not touched with the feeling of your brother's infirmities, nor show any mercy in the opinions you form of his character and actions, no mercy will be shewn you, either from Omnipotence, or the sons of men. God will inflict on you the punishments you deserve, and the world will be sure to retaliate the injury. "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."—*Matt.* viii. 1, 2.

The blessed Jesus, in his pious discourse, charged them to cultivate an entire reformation in themselves; a particular absolutely necessary in those whose office it is to reprove and reform their brethren. And, surely, nothing can be more preposterous, than to condemn in others what we practise ourselves; or to set up for reformers of the world, when we ourselves are contaminated with the most enormous vices. With what countenance can we undertake to rebuke others, when we are ourselves plunged in the most detestable pollutions? Well might the Redeemer of the world say, "Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam

out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."—*Matt.* vii. 4.

Those are the important points of doctrine recommended by the infallible Preacher, as necessary to the teachers of the gospel of peace: but it is not enough that they know and practise the several branches of their duty; they ought to use every possible means of spreading these blessed truths to the ends of the earth, not shrinking from any cross or hardship that may be in the path of duty, nor shunning to declare the whole counsel of God. For whether men will hear or not, they must be faithfully warned by those watchmen who are appointed by the Lord to sound the gospel trumpet. Yet Christian caution should be observed by such as fear and love the Lord Jesus, in teaching others the way of salvation; they should not cast their pearls before swine, should not speak of the deep things of God, or of the heights of Christian experience, before ignorant profane sinners, who would despise these pearls, and trample them under their feet.

Lest the disciples should think obedience to these precepts impracticable, he directed them to apply to God for the assistance of his Spirit, together with all the other blessings necessary to their salvation; assur-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

ing them, that if they asked with earnestness and perseverance, the Father of mercies would not fail to answer their requests, and give them whatever they desired. Adding the noblest precept of morality that was ever delivered by any teacher, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."—*Matt.* vii. 12. How clear a rule of duty is this! and how easy and applicable to practice! Look into your own breast, and do as you would be done by, in the same condition

Having enforced these heavenly precepts, he exhorted them to place an humble dependence on the assistance of the Holy Spirit, to strive to practise the precepts of religion, however difficult the task might appear. "Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."—*Matt.* vii. 13. 14. Strait indeed is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth to life. In the way, nothing is to be found that suits the flesh, but many things that have a tendency to mortify it;—poverty, fasting, watching, injuries, chastity, sobriety.

And with regard to the gate, it receives none that are puffed up with the glory of this life; none that are elated with pride; none that are indulging in luxury: it does not admit those that love riches, or are encumbered with the goods of this world. None can pass through it but those who renounce all worldly lusts, and are resolved to forsake all sin. There is, however, no reason for us to despair of entering through this heavenly portal: if we sincerely endeavour, the assistance of the Holy Spirit will be freely given us; and we shall safely pass through the strait gate, and pursue our journey with ease along the narrow path, till we arrive at the blissful mansions of the heavenly Canaan.

But lest evil-minded men, under the mask of piety and religion, should endeavour to draw them from the paths of righteousness, our blessed Saviour cautioned his disciples to beware of such persons, and carefully make the strictest scrutiny into their lives and doctrines.

Our Lord closed his sermon with the parable of the house built on different foundations; intimating, that the bare knowledge, or the simple hearing, of the divinest lessons of the truth ever delivered, nay, even the belief of these instructions, without the practice of them, is of no manner of importance.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

When will the happy time come, in which professing Christians shall form themselves on these important maxims of their great Master! When shall they be known to be his disciples, by the candour of their sentiments, the equity of their conduct, and the beneficence of their actions, as well as by the articles of their faith, and the forms of their worship!

The way of life which our blessed Redeemer has marked out for us, in such precepts as the above, may indeed to corrupt nature appear "rugged and narrow," and the gate strait through which we are to pass: but let us encourage ourselves against all the difficulties, by considering that immortal life and glory to which they infallibly lead. Then shall we, doubtless, prefer the most painful way of piety and virtue, though with yet fewer companions than we might reasonably expect, to all those flowery and frequented paths of vice which go down to the chambers of death.

CHAPTER VII.

Our blessed Lord cures the Leprosy and Palsy.—Casts out a Devil.—Succours the Mother-in-law of Peter; and afterwards pursues his Journey through the Country of Galilee.

THE great Preacher of Israel having finished his excellent discourse, came down from the mountain, sur-

rounded by a multitude of people, who had listened with astonishment to the doctrines he delivered, which were soon confirmed by divers miracles. A leper met him in his way to Capernaum, and being, doubtless, acquainted with the wondrous works he had already performed, threw himself, with great humility, before the Son of God, using this remarkable expression, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean."

The species of leprosy common among the Jews, and other Eastern nations, was equally nauseous and infectious, but this was so far from preventing the blessed Jesus from approaching so loathsome an object, that it increased his pity: he even touched him; but, instead of being polluted himself, the leper was instantly cleansed, and he departed glorifying God.

The evangelist adds, that Jesus forbade him to tell any person what had been done, but repair immediately to the priest, and offer the gift commanded by Moses.

Having performed the cure on the leper, our blessed Lord proceeded to Capernaum; but, as he entered the city, he was met by a Roman centurion, who represented to him, in the most pathetic manner, the deplorable condition of his servant, who was grievously afflicted with the palsy. The compassionate Re-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

deemer of the world listened attentively to his complaint, and immediately assured him he would come and heal him. The centurion thought this too great a condescension to one who was not of the seed of Jacob, and therefore told him, that he did not mean he should give himself the trouble of going to his house, as this was an honour he had not the least reason to expect, he being confident that his word alone would be sufficient; diseases and devils being as much subject to his commands, as his soldiers were to him.

Our Lord was amazed at these words. Not that he was ignorant of the centurion's faith, or the basis on which it was built; he well knew the thoughts of his heart long before he uttered his request; but he was filled with admiration at the exalted idea the Roman officer had conceived of his power; and to make his faith the more conspicuous, he gave it the praise it so justly deserved. "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."—*Matt.* viii. 10.

This centurion, doubtless, relied upon the miracle Jesus had before wrought upon the nobleman's son; but the excellency and peculiarity of it consisted in applying the most grand ideas of Divine power to Jesus, who, according to outward appearance, was only one of the sons of men.

This exalted faith induced the blessed Jesus to declare the gracious intentions of his almighty Father with regard to the Gentiles; namely, that he would as readily accept their faith as that of the Jews, and place them with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; while those who boasted of being the offspring of these great patriarchs, but fell far short of the Heathens in faith, should be excluded from the blissful seats of Paradise. "And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."—*Matt.* viii. 11, 12.

Having thus addressed the multitude, the blessed Jesus turned himself to the centurion, and said, "Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee." Though the idea thou hast conceived of my power is just, though remarkably great, as a reward for thy faith I grant the petition thou hast asked of me. And, the evangelist adds, "his servant was healed in the selfsame hour."—*Matt.* viii. 13.

On the succeeding Sabbath, our Saviour went into the Jewish synagogue, at Capernaum, and taught the people, delivering his instructions

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

in so graceful and elegant a manner, that they were all astonished: and, to increase their admiration, one of the congregation, possessed with an unclean spirit, cried out in a terrible manner, "Let us alone: what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us! I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God."—*Mark* i. 24.

But the blessed Jesus, who wanted the testimony of no such confessors, commanded him to keep silence, and immediately come out of the man; which command the evil spirit instantly obeyed, to the great surprise and astonishment of all the spectators.

The enemies of the gospel have always endeavoured to depreciate our Saviour's miracles, pretending that no more is meant by a person possessed of the devil than that he was afflicted with some loathsome disease; and that because sepulchres were considered as polluted places, and, therefore, whenever any melancholy person frequented them, they were said to be possessed with unclean spirits. They add, that it will be difficult to assign a reason why demons were, at this time, more numerous in Judea than in any other country.

To the first of these objections, namely, that the demoniacs were in reality nothing more than persons

afflicted with some loathsome disease, we reply, it is evidently false; the evangelist having taken care to be very particular on this head. "They brought unto him (says he) all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them."—*Matt.* iv. 24. "He gave to the apostles power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease."—*Matt.* x. 1. And, accordingly "he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils."—*Mark* i. 34. It is therefore evident, that those said to be possessed with unclean spirits were different from those which had diseases. Let us therefore pass to the second objection, and see whether we cannot give a satisfactory reason why demons were at this time more numerous in Judea than in any other country.

That there were evil spirits of this kind, is abundantly evident from the holy scriptures, the sacred penman having taken care to acquaint us with their origin and fall, their names and numbers, their government and orders, their malicious designs and employments, with several other particulars. So that no one can doubt of the existence of

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

demons, who believes these holy oracles to be the word of God. And it is equally evident, both from sacred and profane history, that before our Saviour's advent great numbers of men were possessed with those evil spirits.

The truth is, these angels of darkness had, at this time, taken possession of so large a share of the world, that they began to rival the Almighty in his worship; and, therefore, one end of the incarnation of the Son of God was, "that he might destroy the works of the devil." And hence we may easily see the reason why Omnipotence suffered these apostate spirits to appear so frequently in Judea at the time of our Saviour's ministry, namely, that the Son of God might, in a more signal manner, triumph over all the powers of darkness, and convince mankind that he was truly the Saviour of the world.

But to return. The fame of this miracle was soon spread over the neighbouring country. He had before healed the sick, and done many other wonderful things; but to command with authority the unclean spirits to quit their residence, and to see these enemies to mankind readily obey his voice, filled men with astonishment, and abundantly convinced them that he was filled with the Spirit of God.

It has been asked, why the devil, who, it is plain from the text, knew our Saviour to be the Son of God, should put it into the heart of Judas to betray him, since this was the proper method of accomplishing the redemption of mankind? But the answer to this is obvious and easy. The devil, doubtless, knew Jesus to be the Messiah; but he was ignorant of the mystery of man's redemption. And, therefore, though he was not ignorant of his divinity, yet he might be so far infatuated as to think, that by destroying his humanity he should defeat the great design of Omnipotence. For however extensive we may suppose his intellectual faculties to be, yet the wonderful work of man's redemption by the death of Christ, was a mystery that no finite understanding could comprehend, till God himself was pleased to reveal it.

Having performed this astonishing miracle in the synagogue, our Lord retired to Peter's house, where he found his wife's mother sick of a fever; but on his taking her by the hand, she was immediately restored to her former health, and arose from the bed and "ministered unto him."

The evangelist St. Luke, in his account of this miraculous cure, tells us, that he "rebuked the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

fever" (*Luke* iv. 39.) to intimate his authority over all diseases; being analogous to the figurative expressions in Scripture, which not only represent all inanimate creatures as servants to the Almighty, but diseases, famine, pestilence, and the like, as executioners waiting on him to inflict punishment on rebellious sinners. "Before him went the pestilence, and burning diseases went forth at his feet."

The fame of these miracles was soon spread through the city; and as soon as the Sabbath was over, which ended at the setting of the sun, the whole city was gathered together about Peter's house, and with them great numbers of sick persons, and those possessed with devils. The sight of so many human objects in distress excited the pity of this heavenly Physician; so that he immediately healed them all. And thus was the prophecy of Isaiah fulfilled: "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses."

But the vast concourse of people that now gathered round him in Capernaum began to be troublesome, and he retired into a desert, whither the multitude soon followed him, and entreated him never to depart from them. But as this request was inconsistent with the design of his mission, he, for the first time, refused

their request, "and preached in the synagogues of Galilee."—*Luke* iv. 44.

CHAPTER VIII.

Jesus confirms his Mission by producing a miraculous Draught of Fishes—Curing the Leprosy a second Time—Appeasing the boisterous Waves—Casting Devils out of divers Persons grievously possessed.

OUR blessed Lord, having spread his doctrine throughout Galilee, returned to Capernaum, followed by such numbers of people that he found it necessary to step into Peter's ship; from whence he taught the multitude, who stood on the shore listening with great attention to his doctrine.

Having concluded his discourse, he turned himself to Simon Peter, desiring him to launch out further from the shore, and let down his net; on which the disciples told him of the unsuccessful pains they had taken during the whole night: but added, that he would, in obedience to his command, make one trial more. Nor had he any cause to repent: for the net was no sooner in the lake, than they found it so full of large fishes, that it was in danger of breaking.

This success, after such fruitless toil, astonished Peter, who, falling down at the feet of Jesus, cried out, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

man, O Lord." He was conscious of the many sins he had been guilty of, and therefore afraid of being in the company of so divine a person, lest some offence might have exposed him to more than ordinary chastisement.

But the benevolent Redeemer of mankind removed his fears, by telling him, that from thenceforth the employment of him and his companions should be far more noble; they should catch men: that is, they should turn them from the crooked paths of iniquity to the strait road leading to the heavenly mansions.

This miracle was considered by the disciples as a plainer manifestation of his being the Son of God, than those they had seen him perform on the sick in the city and neighbourhood of Capernaum. It was a received opinion among the Jews, that all good men, by prayers, and laying their hands on the sick, were able to cure certain diseases, and even to cast out devils; but that the creatures inhabiting the elements of air or water were subject only to the commands of Omnipotence himself: consequently, the power shown by our blessed Saviour on this occasion undeniably proved him to be divine. And, accordingly, this demonstration of his power rendered these disciples for the future absolutely devoted to his will; and in

the greatness of their admiration they abandoned everything, and followed the Saviour of the world.

The disciples being thus attached to their divine Master, followed him through the cities of Galilee, where, according to the usual custom, he preached the gospel of the kingdom of God, and confirmed the doctrines he delivered with astonishing miracles.

In one of the cities through which he passed, he found "a man full of leprosy, who, seeing Jesus, fell on his face, and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean."—*Luke* v. 12.

It was the custom in Judea for the priests to banish from society those who were afflicted with a contagious leprosy. The disease of this person, therefore, was of a less pestilential kind, as he was suffered to enjoy the conversation of men. His case, however, excited the pity of the compassionate Jesus, who immediately cleansed him, ordered him to repair to Jerusalem, and, after shewing himself to the priest, offer the gifts commanded by Moses; giving him the same admonition he had done to others, namely, not to tell any man what he had done for him. But the blessing he had received was so great and unexpected, that, instead of concealing, he published everywhere the great things

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Jesus had done for him; which brought such crowds to the Son of God, that he was obliged to retire from Capernaum into the wilderness, to refresh his body with rest, and his spirit with prayer and meditation.

The generality of commentators suppose that this leper, and the other mentioned in the foregoing chapter, are one and the same person; but this is a mistake. The former was cured in the fields, the latter in the city. After cleansing the first, Jesus went to Capernaum and healed the centurion's servant; but after curing the latter he retired into the wilderness, to shun the prodigious crowds which soon gathered round him, from the leper's publishing everywhere the miracle Jesus had wrought for him.

If the curious should inquire why our blessed Saviour so often commanded the people to conceal his miracles; we answer them—his modesty and humility would not suffer that his works should have the least appearance of ostentation; nor the Jews to have the least pretence for accusing him of “seeking his own glory.” Nor was it proper, at this time, to irritate too greatly the Scribes and Pharisees. He well knew, that in a certain determinate space of time, they would bring about what had been determined

by Providence concerning him. In the mean time, “he was to work the works of him that sent him while it was day,” *John ix. 4.*, and to propagate his gospel with the greater facility, both among the Jews and Gentiles; which could not have been so conveniently performed, if the greatness of his miracles had once provoked the malice and envy of his enemies to exert their utmost power against him. He likewise knew the mad, capricious humour of the multitude, and had reason to apprehend “that they would come and take him away by force to make him a king,” *John vi. 15.*, if all his miracles had been blazed abroad, before he had sufficiently instructed them in the spiritual nature of his kingdom, and that his throne was not to be established in the earthly, but in the heavenly, Jerusalem.

From these instances, we see that the blessed Jesus did not, without sufficient reason, desire his miracles to be concealed. The fame of this single miracle, being spread through the neighbouring countries, brought such multitudes of people to Capernaum, that, as we have already observed, he was obliged to retire into a solitary part of the neighbouring wilderness. Nor could he long enjoy the repose of the tranquillity he sought, even in this thirsty waste; the people soon discovered the place

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

of his retreat, and flocked to him from every quarter.

Our blessed Lord, finding all his endeavours to conceal himself in the desert would be in vain, ordered his disciples to accompany him to the other side of the lake : upon which a certain Scribe, who happened to be present, declared he would follow him ; but Jesus, who well knew that his desire was only to gain the profits and advantages of an earthly kingdom, which he supposed the Messiah would establish, told him, if he intended nothing more by following him than to improve his worldly wealth, he would find himself wretchedly mistaken. "The foxes have holes," saith the blessed Jesus to this teacher of Israel, "and the birds of the air have nests ; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."—*Matt.* viii. 20.

The title "Son of man," is a name by which the Messiah is called in the prophecy concerning him, recorded by the prophet Daniel (vii. 13.) where his universal dominion is described ; and, therefore, when applied to our great Redeemer, denotes his human nature, and, at the same time, conveys an idea of that glorious kingdom over which he was in this nature to preside. But as it was also the name by which the old prophets were called, from the contempt in which they were held up

by their countrymen, it is used on several occasions to express the deep humiliation of the Son of God.

The disciples having prepared the ship, took on board their Master, and departed for the other side of the lake, attended by many boats full of people, who were desirous of hearing his heavenly discourses, and of being spectators of his astonishing works. But Jesus, being fatigued with the labours of the day, set himself down at the stern of the ship, and fell asleep.

The weather, which had till now been calm and serene, suddenly changed. A terrible storm came on, and the rising waves dashed impetuously against the ship, threatening every moment to bury them all in the bowels of the deep. The darkness of the night increased the horrors of the tempest. Now they were carried on the top of the mountainous wave, and seemed to touch the skies ; then plunged to the bottom of the deep, while the foaming billows roared horribly above them. In vain the disciples exerted their utmost strength ; the storm continued to increase, and baffled all the efforts of human strength. The waves broke over the ship, the waters rushed in, and she began to sink. All hopes of escaping were vanished ; despair seized every individual ; and they were on the brink of perishing,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

when they ran to Jesus, crying out, "Master, Master, we perish!" Their vehement cries roused him from his sleep. He raised his hand, so often employed in acts of mercy and benevolence, and with a stern and awful voice rebuked the boisterous element. The raging sea instantly obeyed his command. The aerial torrent stopped short in its impetuous course, and became as silent as the grave, while the mountainous waves sunk at once into their beds, and the surface of the deep became as smooth as polished marble.

The disciples had before seen their great Master perform many miracles; and therefore had abundant reason to rely wholly on his power and goodness. They should have considered, that he who could, by his word, restore the sick, and bring the inhabitants of the sea to their nets, could with the same ease have supported them on the surface of the deep, had the ship sunk beneath them, and carried them safe to the place whither they were going. But they seemed to have forgotten the power of their Master; and when human assistance failed, to have abandoned all hopes of life. The blessed Jesus, therefore, very justly rebuked them: "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" Why should ye doubt of my power to protect you? the voyage was un-

dertaken at my command, and therefore you should have been confident that I would not suffer you to perish in it.

It is indeed strange that the disciples should have been so remarkably terrified during the storm, and after it to make this remarkable reflection: "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!"—*Matt. viii. 27.*

But it should be remembered that the terror of the storm had deprived them of all presence of mind; so that they did not recollect the divine power of their Master, during the fury of the tempest; and the transition from a terrible storm, to the most perfect calm, was so quick and astonishing, that they probably uttered this reflection before the confusion in their minds was over.

Soon after the storm was allayed, they arrived in the country of Gadara: and, on their landing, two men possessed with devils came from the tombs to meet Jesus. One of them, who was more furious than the other, had been often bound with chains and fetters, but to no purpose, being always broken with great fury; so that no man attempted further to restrain him. Being therefore at liberty, he shunned the society of men, wandering day and night in desert places among the sepulchres or caverns where the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

dead were deposited, crying and making the most dismal complaints, and cutting himself with stones.

The disciples were terrified at the approach of these furious mortals; but Jesus soon dissipated their fears, commanding, while the men were at a distance, the devils to come out of them. The heavenly mandate was no sooner given, than they fell on their faces, crying out, "What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God?" *Mark* v. 7. "Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" *Matt.* viii. 29. "I adjure thee, by God, that thou torment me not!" *Mark* v. 7. The apostate spirits well knew the power of the Son of God, and trembled lest he should immediately cast them into the torments prepared for them, and not suffer them to continue roving through the earth till the day of judgment, when they should be condemned to eternal punishment in the sight of the whole creation.

Jesus, being willing that the torments suffered by these miserable men should be known before he healed them, asked one of the devils his name; who answered, "Legion, for we are many," (*Mark* v. 9.) begging, at the same time, that he would not command them to repair into the deep, or bottomless pit, but suffer them to enter a herd of swine feeding at a distance.

How subtle are the wiles of the devil! The power of the Son of God he knew was not to be resisted; but he could not help envying the benevolent miracles he had wrought for the sons of men; and was therefore willing to prevent, as much as possible, their good effects on the miserable people of this country. This was the true reason why he begged leave to enter the herd of swine; he knew, if he could obtain that permission, he could destroy them; and this he hoped would render our blessed Saviour odious to the wicked inhabitants of Gadara.

Though Jesus well knew his crafty design, yet he permitted the devils to enter the swine, that his disciples, and others who were with him, might be fully convinced these unhappy persons were really possessed by apostate spirits; and at the same time give them a terrible instance of their power, when free from all restraint.

The divine permission was no sooner granted, than the spectators beheld, at a distance, the torments these poor creatures suffered; with what amazing rapidity they ran to the confines of the lake, leaped from the precipices into the sea, "and perished in the waters." While the persons, who a moment before were raving and cutting themselves in the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

most shocking manner, became at once meek and composed, having recovered entirely the exercise of their reason.

The keepers of the herd, terrified at this astonishing miracle, ran into the city, publishing in every part the cure of the men possessed with the devils, and the destruction of the swine.

This surprising report threw the inhabitants into the greatest consternation: they left the city to be the spectators of so wonderful an event; but when they saw the men who had been possessed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, decently clothed, and in their right minds, their fear was increased. For knowing they had trespassed in keeping the swine, which was contrary to the law of Moses, they dreaded a more severe punishment; and being ignorant of the goodness of Jesus, though he had given them so remarkable a proof of it in the cure of these wretched mortals, they besought him that he would leave their country.

There prevailed a custom among the Heathens, when any illustrious hero had delivered his country from its enemies, or from any other great evil, to erect lofty columns to his memory; his statue was seen in every place; altars blazed to his glory; they honoured him with the

high appellation of Saviour; and thought nothing, not even divine honours, too great to confer upon him. But when Christ had removed a monster from the Gadarenes, more formidable and fearful than any ir heathen history, even a legion of devils, and rendered the way, by which no man could pass before, secure from danger; instead of being received by them as a Saviour, and as a God, with the acclamations and hosannas of the people, he was besought to depart out of their coasts. Stupid people! they had, indeed, lost their herd of swine: but surely the valuable gift they had received, in two of their countrymen and fellow-creatures being delivered from the tyranny of Satan, was better than the cattle on a thousand hills, and merited, at least, their thanks and acknowledgments.

The stupid request of the Gadarenes was, however, complied with by the blessed Jesus, who, entering the ship, returned to the country from whence he came, leaving them a valuable pledge of his love, and us a noble pattern of perseverance in well-doing, even when our kindnesses are condemned, or requited with injuries. He would not suffer the persons dispossessed to accompany him, though they earnestly requested it; but ordered them to stay in their own country, as a standing mo-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

nument both of his power and goodness. "Go home to thy friends," said the compassionate Jesus to one of them, "and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee." —*Mark* v. 19.

From this remarkable story, we must surely see the most apparent reason to adore the good providence of God, which restrains the malignant spirits of hell from spreading those desolations, among beasts and men, which would otherwise quickly turn the earth into a wilderness, or rather into a chaos. But what matter of joy to reflect, that all their fury is under a divine control, and that they cannot hurt even the meanest animal without permission from above!

We see here a legion of devils trembling before the Son of God, confessing his superior power, howling as it were in their chains, and entreating the delay of their torments. And can human pride stand before him, and rebellious mortals triumph over him? Happy souls that are listed under his banners! they shall share the victories of the great Captain of their salvation, and the God of peace shall bruise Satan under their feet shortly.

But O how wretched were these Gadarenes, who preferred their swine to their souls, and besought him to

depart out of their coast, who was their defence and their glory! May divine grace preserve us from a temper like theirs! And may those of us, who have ourselves experienced the restoring power of Christ and his gospel, be engaged to adhere to our great Benefactor, and gratefully to devote those powers to his service, which he has rescued from dishonour, mischief, and ruin!

We cannot but remark in this place, that we have here a fuller display of the tyranny and power of the devil than in any other part of Scripture; and, therefore, we may oppose it to the loose scoffs, and recommend it to the serious attention, of those infidels and thoughtless sinners, who, like Pharisees and Sadducees of old, when exhorted to abandon their evil courses, from a consideration of the power of Satan, and the dread of eternal torments, made a mock of both, esteeming them nothing more than religious fables, calculated to keep an ignorant world in awe. But with regard to themselves, they vainly think their minds too well furnished with wisdom, and their discernment too penetrating, to believe anything of the flames of the bottomless pit, and the malice of the prince who sways the sceptre of that horrid place; esteeming him a more mild and generous governor than he is represented in this miracle. But

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

could they be persuaded to attend seriously to the miserable spectacle drawn by the evangelists of a wretched mortal, naked, dwelling in tombs, crying out day and night, cutting himself with stones, furious, fierce, destructive; surely their scoffs and idle mockeries would be changed into compassion, and a watchful care of themselves. This certainly common prudence would dictate. But if they will deride, and still disbelieve, a short space of time, perhaps a single moment, will convince them of their fatal error; and dreadful experience force them to acknowledge the greatness of the tyranny, the bitterness of malice, of this prince of darkness against the souls of men.

May that blindness of mind, and obduracy of heart, be removed, that so they may know and acknowledge the salvation of God, even Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life!

CHAPTER IX.

Our Lord proceeds in Acts of Mercy and Benevolence.—Adds Matthew to the number of his Disciples.—Casts out an evil Spirit.—Passes again through Galilee.—Selects Twelve from among his Disciples, as his constant Followers and Companions, and addresses the Multitude in an excellent Discourse.

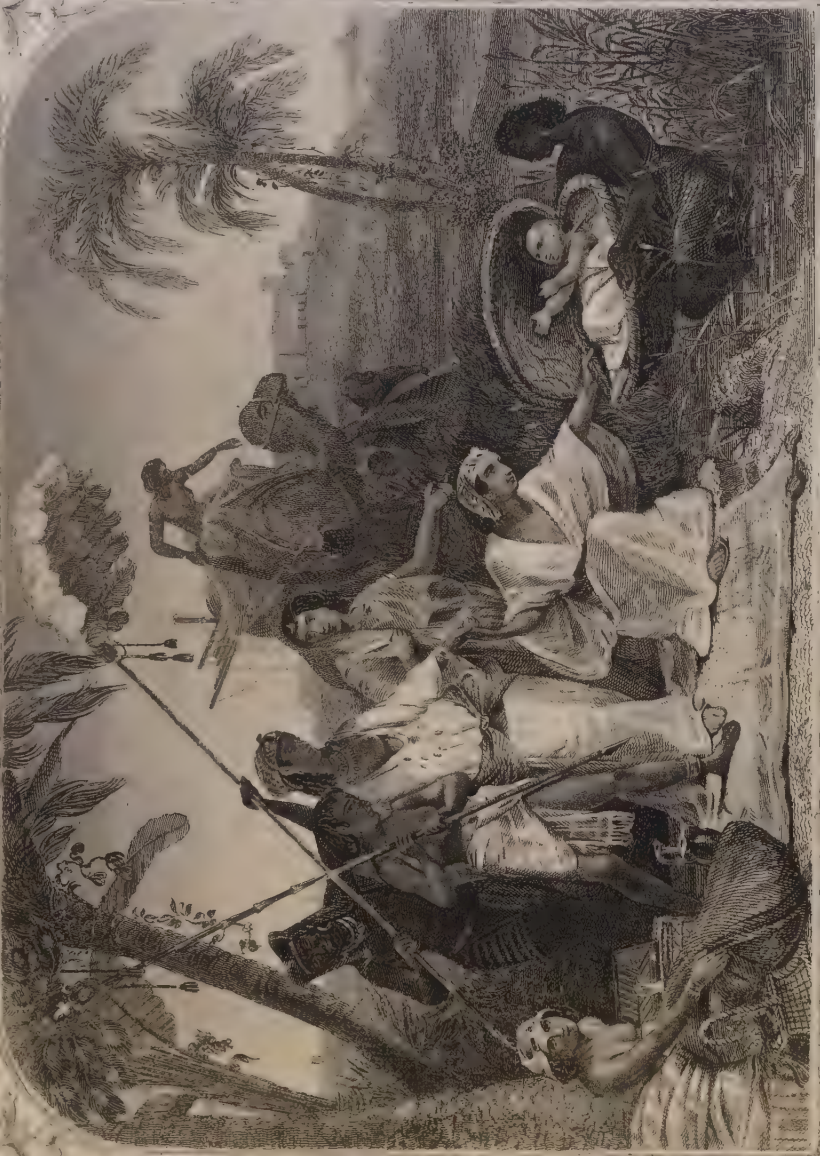
THE arrival of our Saviour and his disciples at Capernaum, a city of Galilee, was no sooner published,

than such throngs of people were gathered together, that the house could not contain them, nor even the court before it. He, however, preached the words of eternal life to the listening audience, among whom were many Pharisees and doctors of the law, who from the fame of his miracles were come from all quarters to hear him.

He not only addressed them in the most nervous and pathetic manner, in order to inculcate the doctrines he delivered; but also performed such astonishing miracles as ought to have removed all their scruples with regard to the truth of his mission.

Among other instances he gave of his divine power, was that of restoring a man to perfect health, who had long been afflicted with the palsy, and was reduced by that terrible disease to the most melancholy condition, being unable to move any member of his body, but seemed rather an emaciated carcase than a man. This miserable object was brought in his bed by four persons, who being unable to enter by the door, on account of the multitude, carried him to the top of the house, which, like the other roofs in that country, was flat, and had a battlement round, according to the direction given by Moses."—*Deut. xxii. 8.*

On these roofs there was a kind



The Finding of Moses

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

of trap-door, by which they came out of the houses upon the roofs, where they spent a considerable part of the day. It was also common to have a flight of stairs from the garden to the roof; and by these the persons seemed to have carried the sick of the palsy; but finding the door fastened, forced it open, and uncovered the roof, and through the opening let down, by ropes, the sick of the palsy, lying on his bed, into the midst of the company, before Jesus; who, seeing the faith of the friends of this afflicted person, had compassion on him, and spake aloud, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee."

The Scribes taking offence at this saying, cried out, This man speaketh blasphemy; for he appropriates that to himself, which is solely the province of Omnipotence. "Who can forgive sins but God only?" They were ignorant that the person who uttered such gracious words was the Son of God; and, consequently, had the power of forgiving the sins of the human race.

But our Lord, who had recourse to the most secret recesses of the heart, and was willing to show them that he was really endued with the Spirit of God, said to them, "Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be

forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?" These were questions beyond the abilities of the haughty Scribes to answer, and therefore they held their peace. The blessed Jesus then added, that the miracle he was going to perform would sufficiently demonstrate that he had not usurped what did not, in the strictest manner, belong to him. And turning himself from those bigoted teachers of Israel, towards the sick of the palsy, he said unto him, "Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine own house." —*Matt.* ix, 6.

Nor was this divine mandate any sooner given, than the man was restored to his former health and strength; and, to the astonishment of all present, rose, took up his bed, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw this great work, expressed the highest degree of surprise; mixed with admiration, for the great honour the Almighty had conferred on human nature. "They glorified God, who had given such power unto men."

But with regard to the Scribes and Pharisees, though they must have been confounded at this miracle, yet they still continued in their unbelief; an instance which should awaken in us the most serious thoughts, as it abundantly demon-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

strates, that the malady of the soul is a much more deplorable disease than the palsy of the body.

The blessed Jesus having wrought this miracle, repaired to the seaside, and taught a multitude of people. What the subject of his sermon was, the evangelists have not told us; but it was, doubtless, like the rest, calculated to promote the eternal welfare of mankind.

His discourse being ended, he returned to the city; and in his way he saw Matthew, or Levi, the son of Alpheus, a rich publican, sitting in his office, where the customs were levied, at the port of Capernaum, whom he ordered to follow him. Matthew immediately obeyed the summons, and followed the Saviour of the world, to pursue a far more honourable and important employment, being afterwards both an apostle and evangelist.

Some little time after his call, he made a splendid entertainment for his Master, inviting all the publicans he knew; hoping, that by hearing the heavenly conversation of Christ, they might also repent, and embrace the doctrines of the gospel.

The self-righteous Scribes and Pharisees, who considered all men as sinners except themselves, especially the publicans, were highly offended that one who called him-

self a prophet, should so far demean himself as to be seen in the company of such men; and asked his disciples, with an air of insolence, in the hearing of all the guests, how their Master could sit down at the same table with publicans and sinners?

Our Lord replied to this artful question, that the sick only had need of a physician, and desired them to reflect seriously on the prophet Hósea's declaration: "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." The turning sinners into the paths of righteousness, which is the highest act of benevolence, is far more acceptable to the Almighty than all the ceremonies of the law of Moses, so highly magnified by your fraternity; who, on many occasions, observe them at the expense of charity: adding: "I am not come to call the righteous," as you arrogantly imagine yourselves to be, "but sinners, to repentance." The chief object of my attention is the conversion of sinners.

This answer, however satisfactory to an unprejudiced person, was far from being so to the Scribes and Pharisees, who, joining with some of John's disciples then present, returned to Matthew's house, and demanded of Jesus, why his disciples wholly neglected to fast, a duty often performed both by the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

rulers of Israel and the disciples of John? To this the blessed Jesus replied, It is not a proper season for the friends of the bridegroom to fast and afflict themselves, while they enjoy his company; "but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast." The various calamities and afflictions that shall attend them, after the departure of their Master, shall cause them to fast, which they shall repeat as often as the circumstances of distress and danger, with which they will be surrounded, shall require. And added, that to have obliged his disciples to observe the precepts of frequent abstinence, at a time when he was employing them to preach the gospel, by which all the legal ceremonies of the law were to be abolished, would have been as absurd as to sew a piece of new cloth upon a rotten garment, which would only make the rent worse; or to put new wine into old leathern bottles, which, on the first fermentation of the liquor, would burst. Indicating, that infant virtue must not immediately be put to the greatest trials, lest it be destroyed by the severity of the exercise.

During this controversy between our Lord and the haughty Scribes and Pharisees in Matthew's house, Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue,

came running to him, in all the agonies of grief; and, in the presence of the whole company, fell on the ground before him, beseeching that he would come and heal his daughter, who lay at the point of death.

When did the beneficent Jesus deny his gracious assistance to those who implored it of him? He immediately arose, and followed the ruler towards his house, surrounded by a great multitude of people, who were desirous of seeing so great a miracle.

But as he passed through the streets, a woman, who had for twelve years been afflicted with an issue or flux of blood, and had spent her whole substance on physicians to no purpose, "came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment: for she said within herself, If I may but touch his clothes I shall be well." Nor was she deceived; for no sooner had she touched the border of the garment of the Son of God, than her issue of blood dried up; and she felt, by the return of her health and strength, and other agreeable sensations that accompany such sudden changes from painful diseases to perfect health, that the cure was absolutely complete.

But this transaction could not be concealed: the blessed Jesus knew the whole, and her secret thoughts, before she put them in practice;

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

and, pleased with the opinion this woman had entertained both of his power and goodness, would not by any means suffer it to pass unapplauded. Accordingly, he turned himself about, and asked, "Who touched me?" He well knew the person; but asked this question for the fuller manifestation of the woman's faith, and that he might have an opportunity of instructing and comforting her.

His disciples, being ignorant of what had passed, were surprised at the question: "Thou seest," said they to their Master, "the multitude thronging and pressing thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?" They did not distinguish between the spiritual and corporeal touch, nor knew that such efficacious virtue had gone out of their Master. Jesus, however, persisted in knowing who it was that had done the thing; and the woman, finding it in vain to conceal her action any longer, came to him trembling, and told him all. Perhaps the uncleanness of her distemper was the reason of her fear, thinking he would be offended, even at her touching the hem of his garment. But the divine Physician, far from being angry, spake to her in the kindest manner, and commended her faith, on which account he had consented to heal her plague: "Daughter, be of good comfort,

thy faith hath made thee whole."—*Matt. iv. 22.*

Such a miraculous incident must, doubtless, have greatly strengthened the ruler's faith; for, behold a virtue, little inferior to that of raising the dead, issues from the border of Christ's garment, and heals a disease, which, for the space of twelve years, had baffled all the prescripts of the healing art, and defied the power of medicine. Indeed, the faith of this ruler had great need of the strongest confirmation, for news was brought him, that his daughter was even now dead, and therefore it was needless for him to give any further trouble to Jesus; not in the least suspecting that he had power to recall the departed spirit, and to reanimate a breathless carcase.

This message was a terrible blow to the affectionate parent. His only daughter, who in a few days before was in the bloom of youth, was now a pale and lifeless corpse; and with her all his joys and comforts were fled. But Jesus, commiserating his grief, desired him to be comforted, promising that his daughter should be restored.

On his coming to the ruler's house, he found it full of mourners, who made terrible lamentations; a sufficient demonstration that the damsel was really dead. And accordingly, when our blessed Saviour desired the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

mourners to cease their funeral ceremonies, as "the maid was not dead, but sleeping," they "laughed him to scorn."

It is necessary to remark, in this place, that the Jews, when they spoke of a pious person's death, styled it sleep, to intimate their belief that his spirit existed in the happy scenes of paradise, and their hopes of a future resurrection to life eternal. But the blessed Jesus used the word with remarkable propriety, to signify that, though she was now locked in the cold embraces of death, yet he was going to release her from the power of the king of terrors, with the same ease as a person is awaked from sleep. Thus our blessed Saviour, in the very manner of performing a miracle modestly declined the honour that would undoubtedly result from a work so greatly superior to all the powers of men.

Having thus briefly addressed the mourners, he entered the chamber where the damsel was lying, but suffered none to follow him, except Peter, James, and John, together with the father and mother of the damsel. Probably his reason for suffering these only to be spectators of so stupendous a work, was, that they might have an opportunity of examining the whole transaction in the most careful manner, and be thence enabled afterwards to report

it upon the fullest conviction, and with every circumstance of credibility.

The blessed Jesus now approached the body, took her by the hand, and, with a gentle voice, said, "Maid, arise." The heavenly command was instantly obeyed; the damsel arose, as from a sleep, and with all the appearance of health and vigour; for Jesus commanded to give her something to eat; a plain proof that she did not appear in the weak and languishing condition of a person worn out with disease, or even like one who had fainted away; a circumstance that abundantly proves the greatness and perfection of the miracle. It is, therefore, no wonder that her parents should be astonished at so stupendous a work, the fame of which was soon spread through all the neighbouring country; though Jesus, who was in every sense above praise, and therefore never courted it, had strictly charged them that they should tell no man what was done.

These instances of power did the blessed Jesus display, to convince the world, that those who die in him are not dead; and that he hath the keys of life and death. Those also of the present age, who believe that the soul sleeps with the body till the resurrection, would do well to consider the expression of the evangelist

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

‘Her spirit came again,” *Luke* vii. 55 ; which sufficiently shows that the soul exists separately, when the body is laid in the chambers of the grave.

Having performed this benevolent miracle, our blessed Saviour left the ruler’s house, and was followed through the streets by two blind men, imploring assistance ; nor did they implore in vain. The Redeemer of mankind was, and still is, always ready to grant the petitions of those who apply to him for relief. Accordingly, he was no sooner entered into the house, to avoid the thronging of the multitude, than he touched their eyes, and said, “According to your faith be it unto you,” *Matt.* ix. 29 ; and immediately the invaluable gift of sight was bestowed upon them.

The blind men were so overjoyed at beholding the light, that though our Saviour charged them to keep the miracle a secret, they published his fame in every part of the country, being unwilling to conceal what, in gratitude for so great a mercy, they thought themselves obliged to divulge.

The men, who had thus miraculously received their sight, being departed, the multitude brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil. So moving a sight could not fail of attracting a compassionate regard

from the Saviour of the world, who, being never weary of well-doing, immediately cast out the apostate spirit ; on which the dumb man recovered the use of his speech, and spoke in a very rational manner to the multitude, who with one voice declared, that such wondrous works were never wrought by any of the old prophets : “It was never so seen in Israel,” *Matt.* ix. 33. This reflection was perfectly just : for no one of the prophets that we read of in the Old Testament appears to have wrought so many beneficial miracles in his whole life, as our Lord did in this one afternoon.

These words did not remove the prejudices of the Pharisees, who, being unable to deny the miracle, insinuated that he did it by a power received from Beelzebub, the prince of the devils. A poor pretence indeed ! and did not escape the animadversion it deserved from the Saviour of the world, as we shall see in a succeeding chapter. Well might the prophet Isaiah cry out in a prophetic ecstasy, “Who hath believed our report ? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed ?”

But all their calumnies could not provoke the meek and merciful Jesus to cease from performing these compassionate offices for the children of men. On the contrary, he exerted himself still more and more to pro-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

mote the prosperity and salvation of the whole human race. Accordingly, he left Capernaum, and travelled through the country in search of miserable objects, on whom he might confer happiness and peace: visiting "all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness, and every disease, among the people."—*Matt.* ix. 35.

In his return from this tour to Capernaum, he was attended by a great number of people, who expressed a more than common desire to hear the doctrine of the gospel. An incident abundantly sufficient to engage the attention of this divine teacher, who was ever careful to cultivate the smallest seeds of virtue, and cherish the least appearance of piety and religion.

It was not this desire of the people alone that excited his compassion towards them: he well knew they were wholly destitute of spiritual teachers; for the Scribes and Pharisees, who ought to have instructed them, were blind, perverse, and lazy guides, who, instead of seeking the glory of the Almighty, made it their whole business to support and augment their own. They magnified the ritual ceremonies and traditions, but took no care to inspire the people with a love of truth and holiness. "To do justice, love mercy, and walk

humbly with their God," were no parts of the doctrine. The small appearance of religion they entertained was wholly hypocritical; and the disputes carried on with so much bitterness, between the factions of the Pharisees and Sadducees, distracted the minds of the people.

The inhabitants of Judea were truly in a deplorable state, which called loudly for the compassion of the Son of God, who always regarded the descendants of Jacob with the most tender affection. He saw the sheep of Israel scattered on the barren wastes of error and superstition, without a shepherd to lead them to the heavenly pastures of the law and the prophets. He saw, he commiserated their distress; and resolved to provide some remedy for it. Accordingly, he directed his apostles to intercede with the Almighty, who by his servants the prophets had sown the seeds of piety and virtue in the minds of the Jews, that he would not suffer the rich harvest to be lost for want of labourers. "The harvest," said the blessed Jesus to his disciples, "truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few. Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest."—*Matt.* ix. 37, 38.

To these gracious acts he added the most powerful of all intercessions to the throne of grace, his own pre-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

vailing prayer; and, accordingly, ascended to the top of the mountain, and there spent the night in making the most powerful petitions in behalf of the lost sheep of Israel, to his heavenly Father.

Having spent the night in this pious exercise, he lost no time in putting his beneficent intentions in execution; for no sooner had darkness withdrawn her sable veil, and the blushing rays of the morning adorned the chambers of the east, than the benevolent Redeemer of mankind called his disciples to him, and chose twelve, "whom he named apostles, to be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach." He ordered them to be with him, that they might learn from his own mouth the doctrine they were to preach to the whole world; that they might see his glory, the transcendant glory of the virtues which adorned his human life; and that they might be witnesses of all the wondrous works he should perform during his residence in this vale of misery, and by which his mission from the court of heaven was to be fully demonstrated.

These twelve persons, thus qualified, were to supply the people with that spiritual food they so greatly wanted, both while their Master continued here below and after his ascension to the right hand of Power.

Having ordained them to their respective offices, he sent them out by two and two, into the most distant parts of Judea, to preach the glad tidings of the gospel, and prepare the way for their Master, the great Shepherd of Israel. And that nothing might be wanting to render their preaching acceptable to the people, and confirm the important doctrines they delivered, he invested them with full power to cure all diseases, cast out devils, and even to raise the dead.

Perhaps the number of the twelve apostles was fixed upon, rather than any other, to shew that God intended, by their ministry, to gather together the scattered remnant of the twelve tribes of Israel. But be that as it may, these twelve apostles constantly continued with him from the time of their election, till he offered himself a sacrifice on the cross for the sins of mankind, never departing from him, unless by his own appointment.

All these persons being illiterate Galileans, and at first destitute of the qualifications necessary to the discharge of their duty, integrity alone excepted, were the most unlikely persons in the world to confound the wisdom of the wise, baffle the power of the mighty, overturn the many false religions which then flourished everywhere,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

under the protection of the civil government; and, in short, to reform the manners of mankind, then universally corrupted.

Had the choice of instruments for so grand an undertaking been committed to human prudence, such, doubtless, would have been chosen, as were remarkable for learning, strong reasoning, and prevailing eloquence. But, behold, the wisdom of God, infinitely superior to that of man, acted very differently; for the treasure of the gospel was committed to earthen vessels, that the excellency of its power might in all countries appear to be of God.

Accordingly, the religion which these illiterate Galileans taught through the world, exhibited a far juster notion of things than the Grecian and Roman philosophers were able to attain, though their lives were spent in study and contemplation. Hence by its own intrinsic splendour, as well as by the external glory of the miracles that accompanied it, this religion sufficiently appeared to be wholly original and divine.

Besides, its truth and dignity were sufficiently attested by the remarkable success that attended it. It was received everywhere by the bulk of mankind with the highest applause, as something they had

hitherto been seeking in vain; while the maxims and precepts of the philosophers seldom spread farther than their respective schools.

It was, therefore, with the highest wisdom that the foundations of the church were laid in the labours of a few illiterate fishermen; for it demonstrated, with irresistible evidence, that the immense fabric was at first raised, and is still sustained, not by the arm of flesh, but purely by the hand of the Almighty.

After appointing the twelve apostles, he came down from the mountain, and was joyfully received by the multitudes of people who were waiting for him in the plain, and pressed to touch him; well knowing, that if they could only touch the border of his garment, they should be healed of whatever distemper they were afflicted with. A sufficient reason why they were continually waiting for him, and were willing to accompany him, even to the remotest corners of the wilderness.

The preaching and the miracles of our Lord were attended to, not by the low and vulgar only, but persons of the first rank and character came from distant parts of the country to converse with him, hear his doctrine, and be spectators of his wonderful works. It therefore evidently appears, that persons of all ranks were

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

desirous of following him ; and their desire could be founded on nothing but the truth of his doctrines and miracles.

After healing all the sick among the multitude, he turned towards his disciples, and delivered a divine discourse, something like that he had before preached to them on the mountain : but in the former he only pronounced blessings, whereas, in the latter, he added curses also ; and in this principally it differs from that recorded by St. Matthew. I shall therefore only select a few passages, from the sermon now delivered, as I have given a larger paraphrase on the former.

“Woe unto you that are rich ! for ye have received your consolation,” —*Luke vi. 24.* Riches, considered in themselves, by no means render us the objects of the Almighty’s hatred, unless accompanied with those vices which too often flow from an opulent fortune ; as luxury, covetousness, and the like. The woe, therefore, is here denounced against such only as are contaminated with these vices ; for those who make a proper use of their wealth, and possess the virtues which should accompany affluence, have no share in the malediction.

“Woe unto you that are full ! for ye shall hunger.” The pain ye shall suffer in a future life shall be sharp and excruciating. The opportunities

you have neglected of doing good to your afflicted brethren in this life, shall then be remembered with the most poignant grief, and bewailed with the most bitter lamentations.

“Woe unto you that laugh now ! for ye shall mourn and weep.” This malediction of our blessed Saviour is not inconsistent with the apostle’s precept, which commands Christians always to rejoice. Neither is the mirth, against which this woe is here denounced, to be understood of that constant cheerfulness of temper which arises in the breast of true Christians, from the comfortable and cheerful doctrine with which they are enlightened by the gospel, the assurance they have of reconciliation with God, and hope they have of everlasting life, and the pleasures they enjoy in the practice of the duties of religion ; but it relates to that turbulent carnal mirth, that excessive levity and vanity of spirit, which arises not from any solid foundation, but from sensual pleasures, or those vain amusements of life in which the giddy and the gay contrive to spend their time ; that sort of mirth which dissipates thought, leaves no time for consideration, and gives them an utter aversion to all serious reflection. Persons who constantly indulge themselves in this kind of mirth shall weep and mourn eternally, when they are excluded

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

from the joys of heaven, and banished for ever from the presence of God, by the light of whose countenance all the righteous are enlivened, and made transcendently happy.

“Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.” Woe unto you if, by propagating such doctrines as encourage men in sin, you shall gain in yourselves the applause and flattery of the generality of men; for thus in old times did the false prophets and deceivers, who, accommodating their doctrines to the lusts and passions of men, gained their applause, but incurred the wrath and displeasure of a just and all-seeing God.

Our Lord here represents those as miserable who are rich and full, joyous and applauded; not that this is universally the case, but because prosperous circumstances are so frequently a sweet poison, and affliction a healing though bitter medicine. Let the thought reconcile us to adversity, and awaken our caution when the world smiles upon us; when a plentiful table is spread before us, and our cup runneth over; when our spirits are gay and sprightly; or when we hear, what to corrupt nature is too harmonious music, that of our own praise from men. Oh, that we may

secure, what is of infinitely greater importance, the praise of our heavenly master, by a constant regard to these his precepts!

CHAPTER X.

Continuation of our Lord's glorious Doctrines, beneficent Acts, and astonishing Miracles, wrought in Confirmation of the Divinity of his Mission, and the extending his heavenly Kingdom.

THE divine Preacher having closed this excellent sermon, he repaired to Capernaum, and was met by certain messengers from a Centurion, desiring him to come and heal a servant, who was dear to him, and ready to die.

This Centurion, from the account given of him by the Evangelists, seems to have been a proselyte to the Jewish religion, as he was a lover of the sons of Jacob, and had erected for them a place of worship; and, accordingly, the inhabitants of Capernaum strongly espoused his cause on this occasion saying, “That he was worthy for whom he should do this. For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.”—*Luke vii 4, 5.*

There was not the least danger that this petition would be rejected by the blessed Jesus, who sought all occasions of doing good to the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

children of men. Accordingly, he very readily accompanied the messengers : but before he came to the house, he was met by some of the Centurion's friends, who expressed the high idea that officer entertained of his power, and desired that he would not take the trouble of coming to his house, as a word was abundantly sufficient to perform the cure. At this message, Jesus turned himself about, and said to the multitude, "I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."—*Luke vii. 9.*

The persons having delivered their message, returned to the house, and found the servant who had been sick perfectly recovered.

Behold an instance of faith in a stranger to the commonwealth of Israel, by which their unbelief was condemned ! Oh, that the virtues of heathens may not another day rise up to our condemnation, notwithstanding a higher profession and much nobler advantages ! We cannot but rejoice to hear that many shall come from the east and the west, to sit down with the pious patriarchs in the kingdom of heaven : but how deplorable is the case of those children of the kingdom, who, with all their towering expectations, shall be cast out, and doomed to hopeless sorrow, and everlasting darkness !

Having thus miraculously healed

the Centurion's servant, he repaired to Peter's house to eat bread ; but the multitude came again together, and surrounded the house in a very tumultuous manner, demanding, in all probability, that he would heal their sick ; and it was not without difficulty they were dispersed by his friends.

The multitude being dispersed, Jesus called unto him the twelve apostles he had before chosen, and conferred on them the power of working miracles, in confirmation of the doctrines they were appointed to preach, and delivered them such instructions as he thought necessary to enable them to discharge the duties of this important commission.

"Go," said their heavenly Master, "and preach, saying, the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Publish in every corner of Judea the glad tidings of the gospel, and the near approach of the great Messiah's kingdom : not a temporal, but a spiritual empire, consisting of righteousness and peace.

To inure them to those hardships and dangers which were to attend them in their preaching, after the death of their Master, our Lord forbade them to provide any thing for their journey ; teaching them to rely wholly on the providence of God for support in every distress, and to have recourse to his protection in every danger.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Our Lord's disciples had, perhaps, flattered themselves with the pleasing expectation, that the glad tidings they were going to publish, and the miraculous cures they were enabled to perform, would procure them an honourable reception wherever they came. Their Master, however, told them the event would not in any manner answer their expectations; but that they were everywhere to be despised, persecuted, delivered into the hands of the rulers, and punished as wicked men. But, at the same time, he promised them the aid of the Almighty, and gave them instructions for their behaviour in every particular. He added, that those who rejected their message should be treated with severity by the great Judge of all the earth; but those who received them kindly, and gave even a cup of cold water to the least of his disciples, for their Master's sake, should not fail of receiving a large reward.

Having received this commission, the apostles visited all the parts of Palestine, where the Jews inhabited, preaching the doctrine of repentance, working miracles for its confirmation, and, particularly, healing the sick, while our blessed Saviour continued the course of his ministry in Galilee.

The apostles being returned from their tour, Jesus went to Nain, a

town situated near Endor, about two miles south of Mount Tabor, attended by many of his disciples, and a great multitude of people.

On their coming to the entrance of the city, a melancholy scene presented itself to the eyes of Jesus and his followers. "Behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow," *Luke vii. 12*. Who would not have imagined, that God had indeed "forgotten to be gracious, and in his anger shut up his tender mercies" from this poor widow, suffering under the heaviest load, and labouring under the most oppressive burden of distress? Deprived of her son, her only son, in the flower of his youth, when he might have repaid his mother's toils, and been to her in the place of a husband; of that husband she had long since lost, and whose loss was supportable only through the comfort of this child, the surviving image of his departed father, the balm of all her grief, the hope of her afflicted soul; who now shall administer consolation to this solitary widow, to this lonely parent, bereaved of her husband, deprived of her child? What misery can be more complicated? What can be more natural than that she should refuse to be comforted, that she should go down to the grave mourning, and visit the chambers of death,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

the residence of the beloved remains of her husband and her son, with sorrow ?

Toward the receptacle of mortality, that dreary waste of forgetfulness, the mournful funeral was now, with slow and solemn pomp, advancing, when the compassionate Redeemer of mankind met the melancholy procession, composed of a long train of her weeping neighbours and relations, who pitied her distress, sympathized with her in this great affliction, and were melted with compassion at her deplorable circumstances: but sighs and tears were all they had to offer; relief could not be expected from a human being; their commiseration, though grateful to her oppressed soul, could neither restore the husband nor the son: submission and patience were the only lessons they could preach, or this afflicted daughter of Israel learn.

But though man was unable to relieve the distress of this disconsolate widow, the Saviour of the world, who beheld the melancholy procession, was both able and willing to do it. There was no need of a powerful solicitor to implore assistance from the Son of God, his own compassion was abundantly sufficient. "When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her:" he both sought the patient, and offered

the cure unexpectedly. "Weep not," said the blessed Jesus to this afflicted woman. Alas! it had been wholly in vain to bid her refrain from tears, who had lost her only child, the sole comfort of her age, without administering the balm of comfort to heal her broken spirit. This our compassionate Redeemer well knew; and, therefore, immediately advancing towards the corpse, he touched the bier: the pomp of the funeral was instantly stopped, silence closed every mouth, and expectation filled the breast of every spectator. But this deep suspense did not long continue; that glorious voice, which shall one day call our dead bodies from the grave, filled their ears with the remarkable words, "Young man, I say unto thee, arise." Nor was this powerful command uttered without its effect. "He spake, and it was done:" he called with authority, and immediately "he that was dead sat up, and began to speak; and he restored him to his mother." He did not shew him around to the multitude, but, by a singular act of modesty and humanity, delivered him to his late afflicted, now astonished and rejoicing, mother; to intimate, that in compassion to her great distress he had wrought this stupendous miracle.

A holy and awful fear fell on all

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

who heard and saw this astonishing event : “and they glorified God, saying, that a great prophet is risen up amongst us; and, that God hath visited his people.”

Here it must be observed, that as this miracle is liable to no objection, it therefore abundantly proves, that the power of the blessed Jesus was truly and absolutely divine. He met this funeral procession apparently by accident. It was composed of the greatest part of the inhabitants of the city, who bewailed the disconsolate state of the afflicted widow, and therefore well knew that the youth was really dead. The powerful word, which called the breathless body to life, was delivered in an audible voice, before all the company, and even at the very gate of the city, the place of public resort.

This miracle, with others amply attested, abundantly evinces the truth of our Saviour's divine mission, and that he was indeed the Son of God, the Redeemer of mankind.

CHAPTER XI.

The Character of John the Baptist cleared and justified by the blessed Jesus.—He visits Simon the Pharisee.—Display of our Lord's Humility and Condescension.

WE have taken notice, in a foregoing chapter, that Herod, in-

censed at the honest freedom of the Baptist, in reprooving his adulterous commerce with Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, had cast him into prison; and in this state he still continued, though his disciples were suffered to visit and converse with him. In one of these visits they had given him an account of our Saviour's having elected twelve apostles to preach the gospel, and of his miracles, particularly of his raising to life the daughter of Jairus, and the son of the widow of Nain.

On hearing these wonderful relations, the Baptist immediately dispatched two of his disciples to Jesus, to ask him this important question, “Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?”

Accordingly, the disciples of John came to Jesus, and proposed the question of their Master at the very time when he “cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits, and to many that were blind he gave sight.” Jesus, therefore, instead of directly answering their question, bade them return and inform their master what they had seen: “Go,” said he, “and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.”

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

—*Matt.* xi. 4, 5. Go, tell your Master, that the very miracles the prophet Isaiah so long since foretold should be wrought by the Messiah, ye yourselves have seen performed.

It appears from the Scripture, that the Baptist, through the whole course of his ministry, had borne constant and ample testimony to our Saviour's divine mission, that he exhorted those who came to him, to rest their faith not on himself, but on "him that should come after him;" and that as soon as he was acquainted who Jesus was, by a visible descent of the Holy Ghost, and a voice from heaven, he made it his business to dispose the Jews in general, and his own disciples in particular, to receive and reverence him, by testifying everywhere, that he was the "Son of God, the Lamb of God, who came down from heaven, and spake the words of God, and to whom God hath given the Spirit not by measure."

The Baptist, therefore, well knew who Jesus was; and, consequently, he did not send his disciples to ask this question, to solve any doubt in his mind concerning the Saviour of the world.

But it may be asked, what else could induce the Baptist to put such a question? To this some answer, that he had no other intention than

to satisfy his disciples that Jesus was the Messiah, so long expected among the Jews; and to engage them to follow a more perfect master, especially as he himself was now on the point of leaving the world.

This solution is doubtless partly right; but to some it does not remove the whole difficulty, as they think it is plain, from the very account recorded by the evangelist, that the question had actually some relation to himself; and therefore they remove the difficulty by another method. In order to which, they say, it must be remembered, that John had been long confined in prison; that he was persuaded it was necessary for him to preach the gospel, and prepare men to receive the kingdom of the Messiah; and for that reason, from the very time of his imprisonment, he earnestly expected the Messiah would exert his power to procure his release. But on hearing that Jesus had chosen twelve illiterate fishermen to preach the gospel, had furnished them with miraculous powers, in order to enable them to perform so great a work, and that two persons of no consequence were raised from the dead, while he was suffered to remain in prison, he began to think himself neglected, and his services disregarded. He therefore sent two of his disciples, to ask him this question,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

“Art thou he that should come ; or look we for another?” Not that he entertained any doubt of his being the true Messiah ; intending nothing more, by asking the question, but to complain that Jesus had not acted the part which he thought the Messiah should have acted ; and that this was really the case, it is thought, is sufficiently plain, from the caution added by our blessed Saviour himself ; “And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me :” as if he had said, When you have informed your Master of what you have seen and heard, tell him that he would do well not to be offended, either at the choice of the apostles, or that no miracle has been wrought for his release.

From this circumstance some think it is evident, that impatience on account of his long confinement was the true reason for the Baptist’s sending his disciples with this question to Jesus ; and that the purport of the answer was, to teach him submission, in a case that was plainly above the reach of his judgment.

Lest the people, from this conversation, should imbibe any notion prejudicial to the character of the Baptist, our blessed Saviour thought fit to place it in a proper point of light. He praised his invincible courage and constancy, which was not to be overcome, or “like a reed to

be shaken with the wind ;” his austere and mortified life, for he was not clothed in soft raiment, like those who wait in the palaces of kings ; adding, that he was a prophet, nay more than a prophet. “For this is he of whom it was written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.” But subjoined, “Notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

The propriety of this remark will appear when it is considered, that though the Baptist excelled all the prophets that were before him, yet the least inspired person in the kingdom of heaven, the least apostle or preacher of the gospel, was greater than he ; because, by constantly attending on Jesus, they were much better acquainted with his character, disposition, and doctrine, than the Baptist, who had only seen him transiently : wherefore, in respect of their personal knowledge of the Messiah, the apostles greatly excelled the Baptist. They were also employed, not in making preparation for the Messiah’s kingdom, but in erecting it ; and consequently greater than the Baptist, with regard to the dignity of their office. Moreover, by having the gift of miracles, and the like, conferred on them, for that office, they were far superior to him

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

with regard to illumination. They were so fully possessed by the Spirit, that on all occasions they could declare the will of God infallibly, being, as it were, living oracles: and having been the subjects of ancient prophecies, they had been long expected by the people of God.

Having thus shown the greatness of the Baptist's character, and wherein he was surpassed by his disciples, our blessed Saviour took occasion from thence to blame the perverseness of the age, in rejecting both his own and the Baptist's testimony.

It seems that the Scribes and Pharisees, seeing their pretended mortifications eclipsed by the real austerity of the Baptist, impudently affirmed, that his living in the deserts, his shunning the company of men, the coarseness of his clothing, the abstemiousness of his diet, and the other severities he practised, were the effects of his being possessed by an apostate spirit, or of religious melancholy. "For John came neither eating nor drinking; and they say, he hath a devil."—*Matt. xi. 18.*

On the other hand, they would not listen to the heavenly doctrines preached by Christ, because he did not separate himself from society; attributing his free manner of living to a certain looseness of disposition, though they well knew that he observed the strictest temperance him-

self, and never encouraged the vices of others, either by dissimulation or example. "The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners; but Wisdom is justified of her children."—*Matt. xi. 19.*

He next proceeded to upbraid the several cities where his most wonderful works had been performed. For though they had heard him preach many awakening sermons, and seen him perform such astonishing miracles, such as would have converted Tyre, Sidon and Sodom, cities infamous for their impiety, contempt of religion, pride, luxury, and debauchery; yet so great was their obstinacy, that they persisted in their wickedness, notwithstanding all he had done to convert them from the evil of their ways. "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell; for if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained unto this day. But

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom, in the day of judgment, than for thee."

Having denounced these judgments on the cities which had neglected to profit by his mighty works, he concluded his discourse with these heavenly words: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."—*Matt. xi. 28, &c.*

This affecting invitation must engage the most serious attention and particular regard of every reader; if the greatness of the speaker, the importance of his message, or the affectionate manner of his address, have any weight, have any force, have any power, to affect the soul. It is Christ, the Almighty Redeemer, the Son of the Most High; he into whose hands, as our Mediator, all things are delivered of his Father; he unto whom all power in heaven and earth is given; even he who shall come in the clouds of heaven to judge all the inhabitants of the earth, and even by those words he hath himself delivered: it is this wonderful Person who speaks, declaring at once his great willingness to receive sinners, and his supreme power to give that rest and peace to

the soul, which should be the pursuit of every son of Adam, and is the gift of his religion only.

And that nothing may prevent our accepting this benevolent offer, he invites, with the most affectionate tenderness, not the great, the happy, and the powerful, not the merry-hearted, or the sons of joys; but "all that labour and are heavy laden," all that are under bondage to sin and sorrow: and those he calls, not with a desire to expose their miseries, to punish their offences, or to display his own glory; but solely with a view to render them happy. "Come," says he, "come to me, I entreat you to come, I will give you rest;" I myself will relieve and release you from your heavy burdens; come to me, and you shall find perfect rest and peace to your souls. "Take my yoke upon you, for it is easy; and my burden, for it is light."

Is it possible that creatures of a day, like us; can it be possible, "that mortals, who have but a short time to live, and are full of misery; who come up and are cut down like a flower; who flee as it were like a shadow, and never continue in one stay;" can it be possible, that they should reject and disregard a call, so full of love, so full of affection, of such infinite consequence, of such unspeakable advantage? Can they reject the love of him who gave them

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

rest, took their burdens upon himself; and who, after all his sufferings, desires them only to come, to exchange their own oppressive burdens for his lightsome yoke; to abandon their sins and sorrows, and become his disciples; to love and obey him, and thence to be happy? Can we possibly despise such grace, refuse such offers, fly from such rest, thus freely proposed to us, and prefer the heavy yoke of sin, and the cruel pangs of a wounded conscience?

Having concluded this public address, one of the Pharisees (named Simon) desired he would eat with him: the blessed Jesus accepted the invitation, accompanied him to his house, and sat down to meat.

He had not continued long at the table, before a woman, who had lately left the paths of vice for those of virtue, placed herself behind him, and, from a deep conviction of her former crimes, and the obligation she owed to the Saviour of mankind for bringing her to a sense of them, shed such quantities of tears, that they trickled down on his feet, which, according to the custom of the country, were then bare. But observing that her tears had wet the feet of her beloved Instructor, she immediately wiped them with the hairs of her head, kissed them with the most ardent affection, and anointed them

with precious ointment she had brought with her for that purpose.

It was a custom among the inhabitants of the East, to pour fragrant oils on the heads of such guests as they intended particularly to honour, while they sat at meat: and probably the woman's original intention was to anoint Jesus in the usual manner. But being exceedingly humbled on account of her former crimes, she could not presume to take that freedom with him, and therefore poured it on his feet, to express at once the greatness of her love, and the profoundness of her humility.

The Pharisee, who had attentively observed the woman, concluded from thence that our Saviour could not be a prophet. "This man," said the Pharisee to himself, "if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that touched him; for she is a sinner."—*Luke vii. 39.*

But though Simon spoke this only in his heart, his thoughts were not concealed from the great Redeemer of mankind, who, to convince them that he was a prophet, and that he knew not only the characters of men, but even the secret thoughts of their hearts, immediately conversed with him on the very subject he had been revolving in his mind. He did not,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

indeed, expose him before the company, by relating what he had said in secret; but, with remarkable delicacy, pointed out to Simon alone the unreasonableness of his thoughts. "Simon," said the blessed Jesus, "I have somewhat to say to thee. There was a certain creditor, who had two debtors; the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most?" Simon answered and said, "I suppose that he to whom he forgave most." And he said unto him, "Thou hast rightly judged." And then immediately he applied this short parable to the subject of the woman, on which the Pharisee had so unjustly reasoned with himself: "Simon," continued our Saviour, "seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet; but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment."—*Luke vii. 44, &c.*

This woman's kind services were in no danger of losing their reward

from the blessed Jesus, who possessed the softer and finer feelings of human nature in their utmost perfection. Accordingly, he added, in pursuance of the kind invitation he had before made to weary and heavy-laden sinners, "Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little"—*Luke vii. 47.*

The blessed Jesus having thus commended the conduct of the woman to the company, and rebuked, with great delicacy, the unjust suspicions of Simon, turned himself to the woman, and, in the kindest manner, assured her, that "her sins were forgiven." But the power he assumed in forgiving sins, greatly offended the Jews, who, not being acquainted with his divinity, considered his speech as derogatory to the honour of the Almighty. Jesus, however, contemned their malicious murmurs, and repeated his assurance, telling the woman, that her faith had saved her, and bade her depart in peace.

The next day Jesus travelled from Capernaum to different parts of Galilee, going "through every village, preaching, and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God."—*Luke viii. 1.* That is, he declared

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

to the people, the welcome tidings of the Almighty's being willing to be reconciled to the children of men, on condition of their repentance, and embracing the gospel of the grace of God.

Leaving Galilee, he repaired to Jerusalem, to keep the passover, being the second feast of that kind since his public ministry. In this journey he was accompanied by certain pious women, "who ministered to him of their substance."

CHAPTER XII.

*Miraculous Cure effected at the Pool of Bethesda.
—Reproof of the Superstition of the Jews, in condemning the Performance of necessary Works on the Sabbath Day.—After doing many Acts of Mercy and Wonder, our blessed Lord is visited by his Mother and his Brethren, and makes a spiritual Reflection on that incident.*

OUR Lord had no sooner entered the ancient city of Jerusalem, so long famous for being the dwelling-place of the Most High, than he repaired to the public bath or pool, called in the Hebrew tongues Bethesda, that is, The House of Mercy, on account of the miracles wrought there, by the salutary effects of the water, at certain seasons. This bath was surrounded by five porches, or cloisters, in which those who frequented the place were sheltered both from the heat

and cold; and were particularly serviceable to the diseased and infirm, who crowded thither to find relief in their afflictions.

These porches were now filled with a "great multitude of impotent folks, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first, after troubling of the water, stepped in, was made whole of whatsoever disease he had."—*John v. 3, 4.*

Such is the account of this miraculous pool, given us by St. John the evangelist. Many controversies have arisen concerning the place, the time, and the nature, of the pool; questions which will, perhaps, never be answered, because the pool of Bethesda is not mentioned by any of the Jewish historians.

The time when this miraculous effect took place is not precisely determined; but it is almost universally agreed, that it could not be long before the coming of our Saviour; and that the miracle was intended to lead us to the Son of God. For the gift of prophecy and of miracles had ceased among the Jews for above four hundred years; and, therefore, to raise in them a more ardent desire for the coming of the Messiah, and to induce them to be more circumspect in observing the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

signs of his coming, God was pleased to favour them with this remarkable sign at Bethesda. And as the descendants of Jacob, in the last times, were not only very obnoxious to the irruptions and tyranny of the Gentiles, but had wholly lost their liberty; so God favoured them with this eminent token of his favour, this wonderful pool, that they might not despair of the promises made to their forefathers being fulfilled.

The pool was situated near the Gate of Victims, which were figures of the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, that they might be convinced God had yet a regard to the posterity of Abraham, and the worship which he himself had established; and might thus support themselves with the pleasing hope of the coming of the Messiah, the great angel of the covenant, to his temple.

And as this miracle of the angel descending from heaven began when the coming of the Messiah was at hand, to advise them of the speedy and near approach of that promised salvation; so Christ entered these porches, which were situated without the temple, and performed the miracle we shall presently relate, to vindicate what was the true intent of this gift of healing, namely, to lead men to himself, "the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness:" and the waters were troubled only at

this certain season of the passover, or at other stated periods, and one only healed each time the angel descended; to shew them at once the weakness of the law, and the great difference between that and the gospel dispensation; and to teach them not to rest satisfied with the corporal benefit only, as in the ministration of an angel, but to reflect attentively on the promises of the Messiah's approaching advent.

Having made these necessary remarks relative to the celebrated pool of Bethesda, we shall now return to the blessed Jesus, who thought proper to visit the porches of Bethesda, now crowded with persons labouring under various diseases.

Among these objects of pity was one who had laboured under his infirmity no less than thirty-and-eight years. The length and greatness of this man's afflictions, which were well known to the Son of God, were sufficient to excite his tender compassion, and make him the happy object to demonstrate that his power of healing was infinitely superior to the sanative virtues of the waters of Bethesda; while the rest were suffered to remain in their affliction.

Had not our Lord at this time restored any of them to health, he would not have acted contrary to the general account which the evangelists give of his goodness on other

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

occasions, namely, "that he healed all who came to him." For such diseased persons who left their habitations, through a persuasion of his power and kindness, were proper objects of his mercy; whereas the sick in the cloisters of Bethesda were no more so than the other sick throughout the whole country, whom he could have cured with a single word of his mouth, had he been pleased to utter it.

Our compassionate Lord now approached the man whom he had singled out as the person on whom to manifest his power: he asked him, whether he was desirous of being made whole?—a question which must induce the man to declare publicly his melancholy case, in the hearing of the multitude, and consequently render the miracle more conspicuous. And as this was done on the Sabbath-day, our blessed Saviour seems to have wrought it to rouse the sons of Jacob from their lethargy, and convince the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that the long-expected Messiah was now come, and had actually visited his people.

This distressed mortal, beholding Jesus with a sorrowful countenance, and understanding that he meant his being healed by the sanative virtue of the waters, answered, in a plaintive accent, "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to

put me into the pool; but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me."—*John* v. 7. But the compassionate Redeemer of mankind soon convinced him, that he was not to owe his cure to the salutary nature of the waters, but to the unbounded power of the Son of God; and accordingly said to him, "Rise, take up thy bed and walk." Nor was the heavenly mandate any sooner uttered, than the impotent man, to the astonishment of the multitude, "was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked."—*John* v. 9.

This great and miraculous cure could not fail of having a great effect on the spectators; and his carrying his bed on the Sabbath-day, which the Jews considered as a profanation of that day of rest, tended greatly to spread the fame of the miracle over the whole city. Nor did the man scruple to obey the commands of his kind physician; he well knew that the person who had the power of working such miracles must be a great prophet; and, consequently, that his injunction could not be sinful. He, therefore, thought that he gave a sufficient answer to those Jews, who told him it was not lawful to carry his bed on the Sabbath-day, to say, "He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed and walk."—*John* v. 11.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

He that restored my strength in an instant, and removed with a single word a disease that had many years afflicted me, commanded me, at the same time, to take up my bed and walk; and surely a person endued with such power from on high, would not have ordered me to do anything but what is truly right.

The votaries of infidelity should remember, that this signal miracle was performed in an instant, and even when the patient did not expect any such favour, nor even know the person to whom he owed it. No one, therefore, can pretend that imagination had any share in performing it. In short, the narrative of this miracle of mercy sufficiently proves, that the person who did it was really divine.

Soon after this miracle, Jesus met in the temple the man he had healed at the pool of Bethesda; and took the opportunity of reminding him, that as he was now freed from an infirmity he had probably brought upon himself by irregular courses, he should be careful to abstain from them for the future, lest the Almighty should think proper to afflict him in a more terrible manner. This man, overjoyed at having found the divine Physician who had relieved him from his melancholy condition, repaired to the Scribes and Pharisees, and, with a heart

overflowing with gratitude, innocently told them, that it was Jesus who had performed on him so astonishing a cure; being, doubtless, persuaded that they would rejoice at beholding so great a prophet.

But, alas! this was far from being the case; the rulers of Israel, instead of being pleased with the accounts of his many stupendous works of mercy and kindness, attacked him tumultuously in the temple, and carried him before the Sanhedrim, probably with an intention to take away his life, merely because he had done good on the Sabbath-day.

Jesus, however, soon vindicated, by irrefragable arguments, the propriety of his works; observing, that in doing works of mercy and beneficence on the Sabbath-day, he only imitated his heavenly Father, the God of Jacob, whose providence was continually employed, without any regard to times or seasons, in doing good to the children of men. And surely he must be more than blind who cannot discover, that the Almighty, on the Sabbath, as well as on other days supports the whole frame of the universe; and, by the invisible operations of his power, continues the motion of the heavenly bodies, on the revolution of which the vicissitudes of day and night, of summer and winter, so necessary to the pro-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

duction of the fruits of the earth, depend.

But Jewish prejudice could not be overcome by argument. Nay, the very observation increased their malice, as he claimed a peculiar relation to God; and by asserting that he acted like him, insinuated that he was equal to the Almighty himself.

The Saviour of the world did not deny this conclusion; but showed that he acted agreeably to the will of God, and was equal with him in power, doing whatsoever he saw done by his Father: a convincing proof of his Father's love for him. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do; for what things soever he doeth, these also doth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will show him greater works than these, that ye may marvel."—*John* v. 19, 20.

The blessed Jesus added, that he had not only power to heal the sick, but even to raise the dead; and that his Father had constituted him the universal Judge of the world; and therefore those who refused to honour him, refused to honour the Father. But, whosoever believed on him should inherit eternal life.

And that they might not doubt of

the truth of his mission, but that he was actually invested with the power of raising the dead, he desired them to remember the undoubted instances he had already given of it, in restoring the daughter of Jairus, and the widow's son of Nain, to life; and consequently, that he could, on any future occasion, exert the same power: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man."—*John* v. 25, &c.

The blessed Jesus added to this, Be not surprised at the power of raising a few individuals from the dead, and the authority of inflicting punishment on a number of the human race; I have a far greater power committed to me, even that of raising all the sons of Adam at the last day, and of judging and rewarding every one of them according to his works. "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the re-



Raising the Widow's Son.
Luke. VII. 15.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

surrection of damnation.”—*John* v. 28, 29.

The great day of retribution will distinguish between the good and the evil; for the tremendous Judge has been privy to all the actions of the sons of men, from the beginning to the end of time: nor has he any interest to pursue, or any inclination to satisfy, different from those of his heavenly Father. “And my judgment is just: because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.”—*John* v. 30.

Nothing could more evince the character of our Lord, than these assertions; though he did not require his hearers to believe them merely on his own testimony; he appealed to that of John, who was a burning and a shining light, and in whom, for a time, they greatly rejoiced, because the prophetic spirit, which had so long ceased in Israel, was revived in that holy man. Nay, he appealed to a much greater testimony than that of John, even that of the God of Jacob himself, who was continually bearing witness to the truth of his mission, by the many miracles he empowered him to perform; and who, at his baptism, had, with an audible sound from the courts of heaven, declared him to be his beloved Son; a sound which multitudes of people had heard, and pro-

bably even some of those to whom he was now speaking.

The Jews had long expected the Messiah; but they had expected him to appear as a temporal prince, who would not only restore the former lustre of the throne of David, but infinitely augment it, and even place it over all the kingdoms of the earth. And hence they were unwilling to acknowledge Jesus for their Messiah, notwithstanding the proofs of his mission were so undeniable, because they must, in so doing, have abandoned all their grand ideas of a temporal kingdom. Our blessed Saviour, therefore, desired them to consult their own Scriptures, particularly the writings of the prophets, where they would find the character of the Messiah displayed, and be fully convinced they were all fulfilled in his person.

He also gave them to understand, that the proofs of his mission were as full and clear as possible, being supported by the actions of his life, which in all things agreed with his doctrine; for he never sought the applause of men, or assumed secular power, but was always innocent and humble, though he well knew that these virtues made him appear little in the eyes of those who had no idea of a spiritual kingdom, but expected the Messiah would appear in all the pomp of secular authority.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

In short, the fatal infidelity of the Jews was principally owing to their pride. They had long filled the minds of the people with grand ideas of the glory and power of the Messiah's kingdom; they had represented him as a potent prince, who was to appear at once adorned with all the ensigns of power; and therefore to have ascribed that august character to a mere teacher of righteousness, destitute even of the ordinary advantages of birth, fortune, and erudition, would have been so plain a confession of their ignorance of the Scriptures, as must have exposed them to the ridicule and contempt of the whole people.

Our blessed Saviour added, that he himself should not only be their own accuser to the God of Jacob for their infidelity; but Moses, their great legislator, in whom they trusted, would join in that unwelcome office; for by denying him to be the Messiah, they denied the writings of that prophet. "For had ye," added he, "believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me: but if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?"—*John* v. 46, 47.

Thus did the blessed Jesus assert himself to be the Son of God, the great Judge of the whole earth, and the Messiah promised by the prophets: and at the same time gave

them such convincing proofs of his being sent from God, that nothing could be said against them.

Convincing as these proofs were, yet they did not in the least abate the malice of the Scribes and Pharisees; for the very next Sabbath, upon his disciples plucking a few ears of corn as they passed through the fields, and eating the grain after rubbing it out in their hands, they again exclaimed against this violation of the Sabbath. But our blessed Saviour soon convinced them of their error, by showing, both from the example of David, and the constant practice of their own priests, who never omitted the necessary works of the temple on the Sabbath-day, that works of necessity were often permitted, even though they broke a ritual command; that acts of mercy were the most acceptable services to God, of any whatever; that it was inverting the order of things, to suppose that man was made for the Sabbath, and not the Sabbath for the benefit of man. Adding, that if the service of the temple should be said to claim a particular dispensation from the law of the Sabbath, he and his disciples, whose business of promoting the salvation of mankind was of equal importance, might justly claim the same exemption; as they were carrying on a much nobler work than the priests who attended on the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

service of the temple. Thus did our blessed Saviour prove, that works of mercy should not be left undone, though attended with the violation of some of the most sacred institutions of the ceremonial law.

Soon after this dispute with the Scribes and Pharisees, our blessed Saviour entered one of the synagogues of Jerusalem on the Sabbath-day, and found there a man whose right hand was withered.

The Pharisees, who observed the compassionate Jesus advance towards the man, did not doubt but he would heal him; and therefore watched him attentively, that they might have something to accuse him with to the people. Their hypocrisy was arrived to that enormous pitch, that they determined to injure his reputation, by representing him as a Sabbath-breaker, if he dared to heal the man; while they themselves were profaning it by an action which would have polluted any day; namely, of seeking an opportunity of destroying a person who had never injured them, but done many good actions for the sons of Jacob, and was continually labouring for their eternal welfare.

The Saviour of the world was not unapprised of these malicious intentions. He knew their designs, and defied their impotent power, by informing them of the benevolent ac-

tion he designed, though he well knew they would exert every art they were masters of, in order to put him to death.

Therefore, when our Saviour ordered the man to shew himself to the whole congregation, in order to excite their pity, these hypocritical teachers declared, in the strongest terms, the unlawfulness of his performing even such beneficent actions on the Sabbath: "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath-day?" They did not, however, ask this question with an intention to hinder him from performing the miracle. No, they had a very different intention than that of accusing him. For they hoped he would have declared openly that such actions were lawful; or, at least, make no reply to their demands, which they would have construed into an acknowledgment of what they asserted.

Nor did our Lord fail to expose their malice and superstition; and accordingly asked them, "Is it lawful, on the Sabbath-day, to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it?"—*Luke* iv. 6. Is it not more lawful for me, on the Sabbath-day, to save men's lives, than for you to seek my death without the least provocation? This severe rebuke would admit of no answer, and therefore they held their peace, pretending not to understand his meaning.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

He therefore made use of an argument which stupidity itself could not fail of understanding, and which all the art of these hypocritical sophists were unable to answer. "What man," said the blessed Jesus, "shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath-day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath-day."—*Matt.* xii. 11, 12.

The former question they pretended not to understand, and therefore held their peace; but this argument effectually silenced them, though they were determined not to be convinced. This unconquerable obstinacy grieved the spirit of the meek, the benevolent Jesus, who beheld them with anger; that, if possible, an impression might be made, either on them or the spectators.

But at the same time that he testified his displeasure towards the Pharisees, he uttered words of comfort to the lame man, bidding him stretch forth his hand; and he no sooner obeyed the divine command, than "it was restored whole as the other."

This astonishing work, performed in the midst of a congregation, many of whom, doubtless, knew the man

while he laboured under this infirmity, and in presence of his most inveterate enemies, must certainly have had a great effect on the minds of the people, especially as they saw it had effectually silenced the Pharisees, who had nothing to offer either against the miracle itself, or the reasonings and power of him who had performed it.

But though these whited sepulchres, as our blessed Saviour justly termed them, were silenced by his arguments, and astonished at his miracles, yet they were so far from abandoning their malicious intentions, that they joined their inveterate enemies, the Herodians, or Sadducees, in order to consult how they might destroy him; well knowing, that if he continued his preaching and working of miracles, the people would wholly follow him, and their own power soon become contemptible. Jesus, however, thought proper to prevent their malicious designs, by retiring into Galilee, and there pursuing his benevolent purposes.

This retreat could not, however, conceal him from the multitude, who flocked to him from all quarters, bringing with them the sick and maimed; who were all healed, and sent away in peace.

Some of his disciples, however, who still entertained the popular

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

opinion, that the Messiah would establish his kingdom by force, and bear down all opposition, were extremely mortified to find their Master retreat from so weak an enemy. But had they read with attention the prophecy of Isaiah, they would have known that this was one part of the Messiah's character. "Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my Beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall show judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust."—*Matt. xii. 18, &c.*

Though there are several small variations between this prophecy, as quoted by St. Matthew, and the original, in the book of Isaiah; yet the sense in both places is the same. And we cannot help observing, that there is in this prophecy an evident difference between the publication of the Jewish religion by Moses, and the Christian religion by Christ. The doctrine of salvation, as taught by Moses, extended only to the single nation of the Jews; whereas that published by the Messiah extended to every na-

tion and people under heaven. Accordingly our blessed Saviour, by retiring into Galilee, fulfilled the first part of this famous prophecy; "He shall show judgment to the Gentiles;" for the evangelist tells us, great multitudes came to him from beyond Jordan, and from Syria, about Tyre and Sidon.

Being now returned into Galilee, there was brought unto him a blind and dumb man, possessed with a devil; but Jesus, with a single word, cast out the evil spirit, and restored the noble faculties of sight and speech. A miracle so surprising could not fail of astonishing the numerous spectators, who now seemed convinced, that the person endued with such remarkable power could be no other than the Messiah.

The Pharisees, who were come thither from Jerusalem, filled with malice at seeing him perform so many miracles, impiously asserted, contrary to the conviction of their own minds, that they were wrought by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of the devils.

So blasphemous a declaration could not be supposed to escape a censure from the Son of God, who, addressing himself both to them and the people, demonstrated the absurdity of the calumny, by an argument drawn from the common affairs of life. "Every kingdom,"

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

said the blessed Jesus, "divided against itself, is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself, shall not stand. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself, how then shall his kingdom stand?" Your calumny is malicious and absurd: it is malicious, because your own consciences are convinced of its falsehood; and it is absurd, because Satan cannot assist me in preaching the kingdom of God, and destroying all the works of darkness, unless he be divided against himself, and destroy all the works of his own kingdom. Adding, "And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you." Ye did not impute the miracles of your prophets to Beelzebub, but received them, on the evidence of their miracles, as the messengers of God. But yet ye reject me, who work greater and more numerous miracles than they, and impute them to the power of evil spirits. Is this conduct reconcilable? These prophets, therefore, shall be your judges, they shall condemn you. But as it is true, that I cast out devils by the assistance of the Almighty, it follows, that the kingdom of God,

so long expected, is going to be established.

But against the Son of man, blasphemy, however great, may be forgiven you, because stronger and more evident proofs of my mission may convince you of your sins, and induce you to embrace the offers of eternal life. And the time is coming, when the Son of man shall be raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Ghost, the gifts of miracles showered on almost all believers, and the nature of the Messiah's kingdom more fully explained, in order to remove the foundation of your prejudice, the expectation of a temporal prince. But if you then shut your eyes, and speak evil against the Holy Ghost, by affirming that his gifts and miracles proceed from the prince of darkness, it shall never be forgiven you: because it is a sin you cannot possibly repent of, as no greater means of conviction will be afforded; but you shall be punished for it, both in this world, and in that which is to come. "Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come."—*Matt.* xii. 31, 32.

This solemn sentence, on the sin against the Holy Ghost, was probably now pronounced by our Saviour, to awaken the consciences of the Pharisees, by a sense of their danger, if they continued in such detestable calumnies, when their own hearts sufficiently told them, that they flowed entirely from malice and resentment.

But all his reasonings and threatenings had no effect on this perverse sect of mortals, who sarcastically answered, "Master, we would see a sign from thee." Strange stupidity! had not he, a short time before, cast out a devil, and restored the faculties of sight and speech to the blind and dumb? cleansed lepers, raised the dead, and even rebuked the tempestuous winds and waves? Were not these signs sufficient to convince the most bigoted mortal? What, therefore, could these stubborn doctors of the law require? Well might the great Saviour of the world call them "a wicked and adulterous generation;" for surely they could boast of no part of the faith and piety of Abraham, their great progenitor. Persons of such incorrigible inclinations certainly merited no indulgence: and, accordingly, Jesus told them they should have no other sign

given them, but what they every day beheld, the sign of the prophet Jonas, who, by living three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, was a type of the Son of God, who should continue three days and three nights in the chambers of the tomb. Adding, that the Ninevites repented at the preaching of the prophet Jonas; and the queen of the South undertook a long journey to Jerusalem, to hear the wisdom of Solomon: but they refused to attend to the doctrines of an infinitely greater prophet than Jonas, or listen to one much wiser than Solomon. Concluding his discourse with a very apposite parable, tending to show the great danger of resisting conviction, and breaking through resolutions, as such actions tended entirely to render men more obdurate and abandoned than before.

During this dispute with the Pharisees, Jesus was informed that his mother and brethren, or kinsmen, were without, desiring to speak to him; upon which the blessed Jesus stretched out his hands towards his disciples, and said, "Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."—*Matt.* xii. 49, 50. This glorious truth should be stamped on the minds of all believers, as it shows

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

that every one, of what nation or kindred soever, who is brought into subjection to the will of God, is allied to the blessed Jesus, and entitled to the salvation of God.

CHAPTER XIII.

Our Lord delivers many remarkable Parables; and explains several of them—Returns to Nazareth, and commissions the Twelve Apostles, whom he had before selected as his constant Attendants and Followers, to disperse, and preach the Gospel of the kingdom of God in divers Places—Circumstances of the Death of John the Baptist.

THE miraculous power of our blessed Lord, both in performing the most astonishing acts, and confuting the most learned of the Pharisæical tribe, who endeavoured to oppose his mission and doctrine, brought together so great a multitude, that he repaired to the sea-side; and for the better instructing the people, entered into a ship, and the whole multitude stood on the shore. Being thus conveniently seated, he delivered many doctrines of the utmost importance, beginning with the parable of the sower, who cast his seed on different kinds of soil, the products of which were answerable to the nature of the ground, some yielding a large increase, others nothing at all. By this striking similitude, the blessed Jesus represented the different kinds

of hearers, and the different manner in which they were affected by the truths of religion. Some wholly suppress the doctrines delivered, in others they produce the fruits of righteousness in different proportions. And surely a more proper parable could not have been delivered, when such multitudes came to hear his discourses, and so few practised the precepts, or profited by the heavenly doctrines they contained.

To vindicate the propriety of our Saviour's conduct, it may not be amiss here to observe, that parables were very familiar to the Oriental nations, and particularly so in Palestine, as we learn from the concurrent testimony of all the Eastern writers; and it was the general method, both of the old prophets, John the Baptist, and our blessed Saviour himself, to allude to things present, and such as immediately offered themselves. Our Saviour also, by using this manner of teaching, fulfilled the prophecies concerning the Messiah, relating to his method of instruction, it being foretold, "that he should open his mouth in parables, and utter things which had been kept secret from the foundation of the world." It is therefore no wonder that the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven are generally the subject of our Saviour's para-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

bles; his grand and fundamental doctrines being delivered in clear, plain, and express terms, but sometimes heightened and enlivened by the addition of beautiful parables. Similitudes of this kind are, indeed, the most simple method of teaching, and best accommodated to the apprehensions of the vulgar and unlearned, and very easy to be remembered, understood, and applied. At the same time, they are the finest veil for mysteries, and the best means of convicting the proud and obstinate, as well as concealing from them those truths which their perverseness and infidelity have rendered them unworthy of having more clearly displayed.

But to return. The parable being finished, his disciples asked why he taught the people in parables? To which he answered, "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing, see not; and hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand."—*Matt. xiii. 11, &c.* As if he had said, You, my beloved disciples, who are of a humble docile tem-

per, and are willing to use means, and resort to me for instruction, and the explanation of the truths I deliver; to you it shall be no disadvantage, that they are delivered in parables. Besides, my discourses are plain and intelligible to all unprejudiced minds; truth will shine through the veil in which it is arrayed, and the shadow will guide you to the substance. But these proud, these self-conceited Pharisees, who are so blinded by their own prejudices that they will neither hear nor understand a thing plainly delivered; to them I preach in parables, and hide the great truths of the gospel under such metaphorical robes as will for ever conceal them from persons of their temper. They have, therefore, brought upon themselves this blindness, that in seeing they see not; and this wilful deafness, that in hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.

The blessed Jesus added, that there was no reason for their being surprised at what he had told them, as it had long before been predicted by the prophet Isaiah. "By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing, ye shall see, and shall not perceive. For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.” — *Matt.* xii. 14, 15. There is some variation in the words, as quoted by the evangelist, and those found in Isaiah, but the import of both is the same, and may be paraphrased in the following manner: The sons of Jacob shall, indeed, hear the doctrines of the gospel, but not understand them; and see the miracles by which these doctrines are confirmed, without perceiving them to be wrought by the finger of God: not because the evidences produced by the Messiah are insufficient, but because the corruption of their hearts will not suffer them to examine and weigh these evidences; for the sins of this people have hardened their hearts, their pride and vanity have shut their ears, and their hypocrisy, and bigotted adherence to traditions and forced interpretations of the law and the prophets, have closed their eyes, lest the brilliant rays of truth should strike their sight with irresistible force, and the powerful voice of divine Wisdom force their attention, and command their assent; being unwilling to be directed to the paths of righteousness which lead to the heavenly Canaan.”

Such are the reasons given by our blessed Saviour for his teaching the

people by parables; and to enhance the great privilege his disciples enjoyed, he added, that many patriarchs and prophets of old had earnestly desired to see and hear those things which the people now saw and heard, but were denied that favour God having, till then, showed them to his most eminent saints in shadows only, and as they lay brooding in the womb of futurity.

But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear, For verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them: and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.” — *Matt.* xiii. 16.

Our Lord having by these means excited the desire of his disciples, proceeded to explain to them the parable of the sower. “The sower,” said he, “soweth the word.” The seed, therefore, implies the doctrines of true religion; and the various kinds of soil, the various kinds of hearers. The ground by the highway side, which is apt to be beaten by men treading upon it, is an image of those who have their minds so blinded by impiety, that though they hear the gospel preached, it makes no impression on their callous hearts, because they either hear it inattentively, or quickly forget the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

words of the preacher. And surely no similitude could more strongly represent this insensibility and inattention than the beaten ground bordering on the highway, into which this seed never entering, it is picked up by the fowls of the air, or trodden and broken by the feet of passengers. "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart; this is he which received seed by the way side."—*Matt. xiii. 19.*

We must not suppose, that the devil has the power of robbing hearers of their knowledge by an immediate act of his own, because he is said to catch away the word sown in their hearts; but by the opportunities they give the deceiver of mankind for exerting his strong temptations, and particularly those which have a relation to their commerce with men: a circumstance that could not escape the observation of St. Luke, who tells us that the seed was trodden down, or destroyed, by their own headstrong lusts, which, like so many birds pinched with hunger, devoured the seed implanted in their minds.

The rocky ground represents those hearers, who so far receive the word into their hearts, that it discovers itself by good resolutions formed on

slight conviction; which are, perhaps, accompanied with a partial reformation of some sins, and the temporary practice of some virtues. But the word has not sunk deep enough in their minds to remain constantly there; its abode with them is only for a season; and therefore when persecution ariseth for the sake of the gospel, and such hearers are exposed to tribulations of any kind, the blade, which sprung up quickly, withers, for want of being watered with the streams of piety and virtue, like the vegetable productions of the earth, when deprived of the enlivening rains and dews of heaven, and a want of earth to contain this balmy fluid, when the rays of the sun dart in full vigour upon them. "But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it: yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for awhile; for when tribulation and persecution ariseth, because of the word, by and by he is offended."—*Matt. xiii. 20, 21.*

The ground encumbered with thorns, which sprung up with the seed, and choked it, represents all those who receive the word into their hearts, but who suffer the cares of this world to spring up, which will, sooner or later, destroy whatever good resolutions are raised

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

by the word. The cares of the world are compared to thorns, not only because of their pernicious tendency in choking the word, but because they cannot be eradicated without great pain and difficulty. In this parable, the hearers of this denomination are distinguished from those who receive the seed on stony ground, not so much by the effect of the word upon their minds, as by the different causes of unfruitfulness in each ; for in both the seeds sprang up, but brought forth no fruit. Those represented by the stony ground have no depth of soil ; those by the thorny ground, are choked by the cares of this world, by the deceitfulness of riches, and the love of pleasures, which, sooner or later, will stifle the impressions of the word ; by which means they at last become as unfruitful as the former. But both are distinguished from those hearers represented by the seed sown by the highway-side, that they received the word, and, in some measure, obey its precepts. Whereas, the first never retained the word at all, hearing without attention ; or if they do attend, forget it immediately. "He also that receiveth seed among the thorns, is he that heareth the word ; and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful."—*Matt. xiii. 22.*

In opposition to these unprofitable hearers of the word, others are represented as hearing the word attentively, understanding it clearly, and treasuring it up with great care. These are convinced of the truths delivered, and practise them, though contrary to their prejudices, and opposite to their inclinations. All those bring forth, some an hundred fold, some sixty, and some thirty, in proportion to the different degrees of strength in which they possess the graces necessary to the profitable hearing the word of righteousness.

Having ended this interpretation of the parable of the sower, he continued his discourse to his disciples, explaining to them, by the similitude of a lighted lamp, the use they were expected to make of all the excellent instructions they had and should receive from him. Their understanding, he told them, was to illuminate the world, as a brilliant lamp, placed in the centre of an apartment, enlightens the whole. He added, that though some of the doctrines of the gospel were then concealed from the people, because of their prejudices, yet the time would come when these doctrines should be preached openly and plainly through the world ; and therefore it was their duty, to whom God had given both an opportunity of hearing, and a capacity of understanding these

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

doctrines, to listen with the utmost attention. "Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed, and not to be set on a candlestick? For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was anything kept secret, but that it should come abroad. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear."

—*Mark* iv. 21, 22, 23. But as it was a matter of great importance that the disciples, who were to publish the gospel throughout the whole world, should listen with the closest attention to his sermons, he repeated his admonitions: adding, that their present privileges and future rewards should be both proportioned to the fidelity and care with which they discharged the important trust committed to them. "Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you; and unto you that hear shall more be given."—*Mark* iv. 24.

Having explained these parables to his disciples, he turned himself to the multitude on the shore, and, in his usual endearing accent, delivered the parable of the enemy sowing tares among the wheat; and on their first appearance astonishing the husbandman's servants, who knew the field had been sowed with good seed; and, in order to free the wheat from such injurious plants, proposed to root them up. But

this the husbandman absolutely refused, lest, by extirpating the one, they injured the other; adding, that he would take care, at the time of harvest, to give orders to his reapers that they should first gather the tares into bundles, and burn them, and afterwards carry the wheat to the granaries. "The kingdom of heaven," said the blessed Jesus, "is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came, and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest, while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say unto the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn."—*Matt.* xiii. 24, &c.

This parable of the tares being ended, he spake another, concerning the seed which sprung up secretly,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

representing the gradual progress of the gospel among the sons of men. He informed them, under this similitude, that the husbandman does not, by any efficacy of his, cause the seed he casts into the ground to grow, but leaves it to be nourished by the teeming virtues of the soil, and the enlivening rays of the sun : in the same manner, Jesus and his apostles, having taught men the doctrine of true religion, were not by any miraculous force to constrain the wills, much less by the terrors of fire and sword to interpose visibly in the promotion of it ; but suffer it to spread by the secret influence of the Holy Spirit, till it attained its full effect. And as the husbandman cannot, by the most diligent observation, perceive the corn in his field extending its dimensions as it grows ; so the ministers of Christ were not, at the first planting of the gospel, to expect to see it make a sudden progress through the world.

The ministers of religion must not, however, from hence imagine, that religion will flourish without their carefully and importunately pressing its precepts upon the minds of their hearers. The parable was spoken to inform the Jews in particular, that neither the Messiah nor his servants would employ force to establish the kingdom of God, as they vainly expected the Messiah

would have done ; and to prevent the disciples from fainting, when they saw that an immediate and rapid success did not attend their labours. “ So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground ; and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself : first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.” — *Mark* iv. 26, &c.

The next parable he spake to the multitude was that of the mustard-seed, which though very small when sown, becomes, in Palestine and other parts of the East, a full-spreading tree. Intimating to his audience, under this similitude, that notwithstanding the gospel would at first appear contemptible, from the ignominy flowing from the crucifixion of its Author, the strictness of its precepts, the weakness of the persons by whom it was preached, and the small number and mean condition of those who received it ; yet being founded on truth itself, it would increase to an astonishing magnitude, filling the whole earth, and affording a spiritual nourishment to persons of all nations, who should enjoy all the privileges of the Mes-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

siah's kingdom equally with the Jews. And surely a more proper parable could not have been uttered, to encourage his disciples to persevere in the work of the ministry, notwithstanding it would in the beginning be opposed by the learned, the rich, and the powerful. "The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard-seed, which a man took and sowed in his field. Which indeed is the least of all seed; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof."—*Matt. xiii. 31, 32.*

Our blessed Saviour concluded his discourse to the multitude with the parable of the leaven, to intimate the influence of the doctrine of the gospel on the minds of particular persons. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened."—*Matt. xiii. 33.*

While Jesus was thus employed in his heavenly Father's business, his mother and brethren came a second time, desiring to see him. In all probability they feared that the continued fatigue of preaching would injure his health; and were therefore desirous of taking him with them, that he might refresh himself. But the blessed Jesus, who was

never weary of doing good, answered his indulgent parent, as before: "My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it."—*Luke viii. 21.*

Night approaching, Jesus dismissed the multitude, and returned to the house in Capernaum where he abode, and there explained to his disciples the parable of the tares in the field. The husbandman, said the blessed Saviour, is the Son of man; the field, the Christian church, planted in different parts of the world; the wheat, are those that believe in Christ, who obey the precepts of the gospel, and are supported by the influences of the Holy Spirit; and the tares the bad professors, seduced into the paths of vice by the temptations of the devil. Our blessed Lord, therefore, by this parable represented the mixed nature of the church on earth, the dismal end of the hypocrites, and those who forget God; for these may deceive for a time, by assuming the robes of virtue and religion, yet they will not fail, sooner or later, to betray themselves, and show that they are only wolves in sheep's clothing. At the same time, however sincerely we may wish to see the church freed from her corrupted members, we must not extirpate them by force, lest, being deceived by outward appearances, we also destroy the wheat,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

or sound members. We must leave this distinction to that awful day, when the great Messiah will descend to judgment; for then a final separation will be made: the wicked cast into torments that will never have an end; but the righteous received into life eternal, where they "shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."—*Matt.* xiii. 43.

Our Lord, on this occasion, delivered the parable of the treasure hid in the field, and of the pearl of great price, both designed for the same purpose, to promote the diligence, zeal, and resolution of his disciples, in searching into and teaching these great and important truths, in which the glory of God, and the salvation of souls, were so much concerned. And surely, the similitudes, both of the treasure and pearl, are very naturally used to signify the gospel; the former, as it enriches all who possess it; and the latter, because it is more precious than rubies.

But, that the disciples must expect that the Christian church would consist of a mixed multitude of people, the good blended with the bad, in such a manner that it would be difficult to separate them; he compared it to a net cast into the sea, which gathered fish of every kind, good and bad, which were separated

when the net was drawn to land; that is, at the last great day of accounts, when the righteous will be conveyed to life eternal, and the wicked cast into everlasting misery.

Our blessed Saviour, having finished these parables, asked his disciples, if they understood them? and upon their answering in the affirmative, he added, that every teacher of the gospel ought to resemble a person whose house was completely furnished, and brought "forth out of his treasure things new and old."

Soon after, Jesus left Capernaum, and repaired to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and preached in the synagogue the glad tidings of the kingdom of God; but his townsmen, though astonished at his doctrine, could not overcome the prejudices they had conceived against him, on account of the meanness of his family, and thence refused to own him for the Messiah. Our Saviour, finding them the same incorrigible persons as when he visited them before, departed from them, and taught in the neighbouring villages. They, in common with all the Jews, were strangers to the true character of the Messiah, whom they considered as a temporal prince; and therefore could not bear that a person, so mean as Jesus appeared to be, should perform works peculiar to that idol of their vanity, a glorious, triumphant, secular Messiah



Well of Nazareth

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

While our Lord resided in the neighbourhood of Nazareth, he sent out his disciples to preach in different parts of Galilee, and to proclaim the glad tidings, that God was then going to establish the kingdom of the Messiah, wherein he would be worshipped in spirit and in truth. And in order that they might confirm the doctrines they delivered, and prove that they had received their commission from the Son of God, they were endowed with the power of working miracles. How long they continued their preaching cannot be known, but it is reasonable to think they spent a considerable time in it, preaching in several parts of Judea.

The miracles which the apostles wrought raised the expectations of men higher than ever; the people were astonished to see the disciples of Jesus perform so many miracles; and thence concluded, that our Saviour must be greater than any of the old prophets, who could not transmit the power they enjoyed to any other. This extraordinary circumstance could not fail of spreading his fame through the whole country; it even reached the ears of Herod the Tetrarch, who, fearing a person of such extraordinary abilities, was very uneasy; which some of his courtiers observing, endeavoured to remove, telling him, that one of

the old prophets was risen from the dead: but this did not satisfy him, and he declared that he believed it was John the Baptist risen from the dead. "And he said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him."—*Matt.* xiv. 2.

The evangelists having on this account mentioned John the Baptist, inform us that Herod had put him to death; but when this happened is uncertain.

It has already been observed, that Herod had cast John into prison for his boldness in reproving him for the adulterous commerce in which he lived with his brother's wife. The sacred writers have not told us how long he continued in prison; but it is plain from his two disciples, who came from him to our Saviour, that his followers did not forsake him in his melancholy condition. Nay, Herod himself both respected and feared him, knowing that he was highly and deservedly beloved by the people; he consulted him often, and in many things followed his advice. But Herodias, his brother's wife, with whom he lived in so shameful a manner, being continually uneasy lest Herod should be prevailed upon to set him at liberty, sought all opportunities to

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

destroy him : and at last an incident happened, which enabled her to accomplish her intention.

The king having on his birth-day made a great feast for his friends, she sent her daughter Salome, whom she had by Philip, her lawful husband, into the saloon, to dance before the king and his guests. Her performance was remarkably elegant, and so charmed Herod, that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked.

Having obtained so remarkable a promise, she ran to her mother, desiring to know what she should ask ; and was instructed by that wicked woman, to require the head of John the Baptist. Her mother's desire, doubtless, surprised Salome, as she could not possibly see the use of asking what would be of no service to her. But Herodias would take no denial, peremptorily insisting on her demanding the head of the Baptist. Accordingly, she returned to Herod, saying, "I will that thou give me, by and by, in a charger, the head of John the Baptist."

So cruel a request thrilled every breast : the gaiety of the king was vanished ; he was vexed and confounded. But being unwilling to appear either rash, fickle, or false, before a company of the first persons of his kingdom for rank and charac-

ter, he commanded the head to be given her ; not one of the guests having the courage to speak a single word in behalf of an innocent man, or attempt to divert Herod from his mad purpose, though he gave them an opportunity of doing it, by signifying to them that he performed his oath merely out of regard to the company. Thus Herod, through a misplaced regard to his oath and his guests, committed a most unjust and cruel action ; an action that will for ever brand his memory with dishonour, and render his very name detestable to the latest posterity.

Soon after the command was given, the head of that venerable prophet, whose rebukes had struck Herod with awe in his loosest moments, and whose exhortations had often alarmed his guilty conscience, was brought, pale and bloody, in a charger, and given to the daughter of Herodias in the presence of all the guests.

The young lady eagerly received the bloody present, and carried it to her mother, who enjoyed the whole pleasure of revenge, and feasted her eyes with the sight of her enemy's head, now silent and harmless. But she could not silence the name of the Baptist ; it became louder and louder, filling the earth and heavens, and publishing to every

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

people and nation this woman's baseness and adultery.

Thus fell that great and good man, John the Baptist, who was proclaimed, by our blessed Saviour himself, to be "more than a prophet." Josephus tells us, that his whole crime consisted in exhorting the Jews to the love and practice of virtue; and in the first place, to piety, justice, and regeneration, or newness of life; and not by the abstinence from this or that particular sin, but by an habitual purity of mind and body.

It may not be improper on this occasion to hint, that the history of this birth-day, transmitted to posterity in the Scriptures, stands a perpetual beacon, to warn the great, the gay, and the young, to beware of dissolute mirth. Admonished by so fatal an example, they should be careful to maintain, in the midst of their cheerfulness, an habitual recollection of spirit, lest reason, at any time enervated by the pleasures of sense, should slacken the rein of wisdom, or let it drop, though only for a moment; because their headstrong passions, ever impatient of control, may catch the opportunity, and rush with them into follies, whose consequences will be unspeakably, perhaps eternally, bitter.

CHAPTER XIV.

Our Lord adds to the confirmation of his Mission and doctrine, by working a miracle in the Wilderness of Bethsaida—The people, struck with the Power and Grace of the blessed Jesus, propose to raise him to the earthly Dignity of King.—Peter, by Means of his blessed Master, performs a Miracle in walking upon the sea—Our Lord's Improvement of the Miracles wrought in the Wilderness, introduced in a Discourse delivered in the Synagogue of Capernaum.

THE disciples were so alarmed at the cruel fate of the Baptist, whose memory they highly revered, that they returned from their mission, and assisted in performing the last offices to the body of their old master, many of the apostles having been originally disciples of John. As soon as these pious rites were over, they repaired to Jesus, and told him all that had happened.

Their compassionate Master, on hearing this melancholy news, retired with them by sea into a desert place, belonging to Bethsaida, that by retirement, meditation, and prayer, they might be refreshed and recruited for their spiritual labours; and, at the same time, leave an example to us, that we should often retire from the noise and hurry of the world, and offer up the most fervent prayers to our heavenly Father.

But the multitude attended so closely, that their departure was not long concealed; and great numbers of people repaired to the place

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

where they supposed Jesus and his disciples had secluded themselves. Struck with the greatness of his miracles on those that were sick, and anxious to hear more instructions from the mouth of so divine a teacher, no difficulties were too great for them to surmount, nor any place too retired for them to penetrate, in search of their admired preacher.

Nor was the beneficent Saviour of the world regardless of their pious esteem. He saw them, he was "moved with compassion" towards them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: multitudes of people without a pastor; a large harvest without labourers: motives abundantly sufficient to excite compassion in the Son of God.

The situation of those numerous throngs of people scattered abroad, without a guide, without a guardian; a large flock of defenceless sheep, without a single shepherd to defend them from the jaws of the infernal wolf; was truly deplorable: the blessed Jesus, therefore, that "good Shepherd, who came to lay down his life for the sheep," was moved with pity towards them: the same pity which brought him from the courts of heaven, for the sake of his lost and wandering sheep in the desert, now brought him to this multitude of people, whom he instructed in the doctrines of eternal

life; and, with his usual goodness, healed all the sick among them.

Intently devoted to teaching and healing the people, our blessed Saviour did not seem to notice the day to wear away, and that the greatest part of it was already spent: but his disciples, too anxious about the things of this world, thought proper to advise him of it; as if the Son of God wanted any directions from man. The day, said his disciples, is now far advanced, and the place a solitary desert, where neither food nor lodging can be procured: it would therefore be convenient to dismiss the people, that they may repair to the towns or villages on the borders of the wilderness, and provide themselves with food and lodging; for they have nothing to eat.

But our Lord prevented that trouble, by telling them there was no necessity for sending the people away to procure victuals for themselves, as they might satisfy the hunger of the multitude by giving them to eat. And at the same time, to prove what opinion his disciples entertained of his power, addressed himself to Philip, who was well acquainted with the country, and said, "Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?"

Philip, astonished at the seeming impossibility of procuring a supply



Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

for so great a multitude, with the small sum of money which he knew was their all, and, forgetting the extent of his Master's power, answered, "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little."—*John* vi. 7.

Our blessed Saviour might now have put the same question to Philip that he did on another occasion: "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?"—*John* xiv. 9. Hast thou beheld so many miracles, and art still ignorant that I can supply food, not only for this people, but for all the sons of men, and for "the cattle upon a thousand hills?"

But he contented himself with answering, "Give ye them to eat." The twelve, yet not comprehending the design of their Master, repeated the objection of Philip; but added, that they were willing to expend their whole stock, in order to procure as large a supply as possible. "Shall we go," said they, "and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, that they may eat?"

But this was by no means the design of their great Master, who, instead of making a direct answer to their question, asked them, "How many loaves have ye?" How much provision can be found among this multitude? Go and see.

The disciples obeyed the command of their Master; and Andrew soon returned, to inform him that the whole stock amounted to no more than five barley-loaves, and two small fishes; a quantity so inconsiderable, that they scarcely deserved notice. "What are they," said his disciples, "among so many?" What, indeed, would they have been among such a multitude of people, if they had not been distributed by the creating hand of the Son of God?

Jesus, notwithstanding the smallness of the number, ordered them to be brought to him, and immediately commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, with which the place abounded, directing his disciples at the same time to range them in a regular order, by hundreds and fifties in a company, each company forming a long square, containing a hundred in rank, and fifty in file, that the number might be more easily ascertained, and the people more regularly served.

In obedience to his command, the people sat down in the manner they were ordered, big with the expectation of what this uncommon preparation portended: while the great Master of the banquet stood ready to supply the necessities of all his guests; a banquet where, though they had no canopy but the azure

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

sky, no table but the verdant turf, where their food was only coarse barley-bread and dried fishes, and their drink only water from a bubbling fountain, yet displayed more real gaud, by the presence of the divine Master of it, than the royal feast of gorgeous Ahasuerus, or the splendid entertainment of the imperious Nebuchadnezzar.

The multitude being seated, Jesus took the loaves and fishes into his hands, in the sight of all the people, that they might be convinced of the small quantity of provisions that were then before them, and that they could only expect to be fed by his supernatural power. But that hand, which had constantly sustained nature, could now easily multiply these five loaves and two fishes; for, as the Psalmist elegantly observes, "He openeth his hand, and filleth all things living with plenteousness." Accordingly, he looked up to heaven, returned thanks to God, the liberal giver of all good things, for his infinite beneficence in furnishing food for all flesh, and for the power he had conferred on him of relieving mankind by his miracles, particularly for that he was about to work. This done, he blessed them; and so peculiarly efficacious was his blessing, that these five barley-loaves and two fishes were multiplied into a quan-

tity sufficient to supply the wants of five thousand men, besides women and children, who, on the most favourable supposition, must amount to an equal number. "And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down: and likewise of the fishes, as much as they would."

—*John* vi. 11.

Thus did the compassionate and powerful Redeemer feed at least ten thousand people with five barley-loaves and two small fishes, giving a magnificent proof both of his power and goodness. For after all had eaten to satiety, they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces: a much larger quantity than was at first set before our Lord to divide.

Miraculous work! But what is too hard for God? what is impossible to Omnipotence? Strange perverseness of the sons of men, that after such manifestations of Almighty power, they should incredulously doubt, or impiously distrust, the providence and fatherly care of this Sovereign, this infinitely gracious Being, into whose hands the Father hath delivered this world, and all its concerns! We are his by right of creation and redemption, and him we are bound to serve and blessed are they who are faithful to so kind a Master, and are

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

obedient to so compassionate a Father.

The literal account of this miracle, as recorded by the several evangelists, is very plain, as well as circumstantial: and it is remarkable that the circumstances of the place and time tended to magnify its greatness. The place was a desert, where there was no possibility of procuring any sustenance. Had he done this mighty work in any of the towns or villages round about, the Pharisees in those days, and the infidels in ours, might have objected, that he had received secretly some supplies; but this, in the present case, was impossible. The time was the evening; the people had been all the day fasting, and consequently were ready for their meal: had it been done in the morning, they might have said, either that the people had been just refreshed, or were not hungry; consequently the miracle not great. But the time and place wholly removed all objections of this kind, and proved, beyond all possibility of doubt, that "God can furnish a table in the wilderness."

We should learn from this great miracle to remember, That it is the Lord who every year blesses mankind with plentiful supplies of everything necessary; it is this Lord who, agreeably to the emphatical words of David, "visiteth the earth and

blesseth it; who maketh it very plenteous; who watereth her furrows, and sendeth rain into the little valleys thereof; who maketh it soft with showers, and blesseth the increase of it; who crowneth the year with his goodness, while his clouds drop fatness, making the valleys stand so thick with corn that they laugh and sing;" whose beneficent hand and liberal bounty call for all their praise, and claim all their thankfulness. For, however inattentively we may behold this mighty work of Omnipotence, it is no less a mercy that our Lord should every day support and feed the whole race of mankind, and all the creatures of his hand, than that Christ should feed five thousand with five loaves and two fishes; for what proportion do five thousand bear to those myriads of men who are daily fed from the fruits of the earth? the increase of which is equally wonderful with the increase of the bread and loaves by the blessing of Jesus! How small is the seed sown, when compared with the produce! It is carried out in handfuls, and brought home in sheaves; and who can tell by what secret operations this wonderful effect is wrought? Nature is equally wonderful in all her works as in this particular; and the Divinity, to an attentive observer, equally visible in these regular pro-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

ductions, as in miraculous supplies afforded; equally seen in the wine produced from the moisture of the earth, filtrated through the branches of the vine, as in that instantaneously made from water at the marriage of Cana; equally seen in the corn gradually ripened, and made into bread for the support of mankind, as in the bread miraculously blessed to the support of the five thousand. But the constant repetition of these surprising operations renders them common, and, being common, they are less observed. Our heavenly Father, therefore, condescends to deviate from the common order of things, to rouse and awaken our attention. But if we are dead and utterly inattentive to the works of God in nature, where we see the divine magnificence and bounty so visibly, so richly displayed, there is too much reason to fear that outward miracles will not now awaken us. We are, however, apt to deceive ourselves in this respect, and are often led to conclude that, had we been present at so stupendous a miracle as that we are contemplating, we should have adored the divine hand that wrought it, and never have forsaken the blessed Jesus. But, alas! if all the displays of God's divine power in the works of creation, if all the evidences of his omnipotence, if the

continual supplies of his bounty, and the most legible characters of his adorable love, written upon all the creatures of his hand, will not produce in us grateful and rejoicing hearts to him, there is great reason to fear, that, had we seen the blessed Jesus feed five thousand men with five barley loaves and two small fishes, had we ourselves been partakers of this miraculous banquet, we should have acted like many who really enjoyed these privileges, and have turned away at some of his hard sayings, "and walked no more with him."

But to return. The people, when they had seen the Saviour of the world perform so stupendous a miracle, were astonished above measure; and, in the height of their transport, proposed to take Jesus by force, and make him a king, concluding, that he must then assume the title of the Messiah whose coming they had so long earnestly expected, and under whose reign they expected all kinds of temporal felicities.

But our Lord, well knowing the intentions of the multitude, and the inclinations of his disciples to second them, ordered the latter to repair immediately to their boat and sail for Bethsaida, while he sent away the multitude. They would, it seems, gladly have detained the people, with whom they fully agreed in sentiments; and even lingered

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

till he constrained them to get into the boat; so fully were they still possessed that their Master was to take the reins of government, and become a powerful prince over the house of Jacob.

The people suffered the disciples to depart without the least remorse, as they saw that Jesus did not go with them.

Perhaps they imagined he was sending them away, to provide such things as they had need of. Nor did they refuse to disperse when he commanded them, purposing to return in the morning, as we find they actually did.

Having thus sent the disciples and the multitude away, Jesus repaired himself to the summit of a mountain, spending the evening in heavenly contemplations, and ardent prayers to his almighty Father.

But the disciples, meeting with a contrary wind, could not continue their course to Bethsaida, which lay about two leagues to the northward of the desert mountain where the multitude were miraculously fed. They, however, did all in their power to land as near that city as possible, but were tossed up and down all the night by the tempest; so that in the fourth watch, or between three and six o'clock in the morning, they were not above a league from the shore.

Their divine Master beheld from the mountain their distressed situation; but they were ignorant of his presence, though he was now coming to their relief. From hence we should learn, when the stormy billows of affliction assault and seem ready to overwhelm us, not to despair of relief; for he who beholds every particular of our distress hath not "forgotten to be gracious," but will surely come to our help, and work our deliverance in a manner altogether unexpected. He often calms the storm of affliction that surrounds us, and commands the bellowing waves of trouble to subside. Human wisdom, indeed, is often at a loss; it can discover no hopes of deliverance, nor see any way to escape; but the Almighty can easily effect the one, or point out the other.

Such was the state of the disciples; they were tossed by boisterous waves, and opposed in their course by the rapid current of the wind, so that all hopes of reaching the place intended were vanished; when, behold, their heavenly Master, to assist them in this distressful situation, comes to them, walking on the foaming surface of the sea. Their Lord's approach filled them with astonishment; they took him for an apparition, and shrieked for fear. Their terrors were, however,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

soon removed; their great and affectionate Master talked to them, with the sound of whose voice they were perfectly acquainted. "Be of good cheer," said the blessed Jesus; "it is I, be not afraid."

Peter, a man of a warm and forward temper, beholding Jesus walking on the sea, was exceedingly amazed, and conceived the strongest desire of being enabled to perform so wonderful an action.

Accordingly, without the least reflection, he immediately begged that his Master would bid him come to him on the water. He did not doubt but that Jesus would gratify his request, as it sufficiently intimated that he would readily undertake anything, however difficult, at the command of his Saviour. But it appeared, that his faith was too weak to support him to that height of obedience to which he would have willingly soared. To convince this forward disciple of the weakness of his faith, and render him more diffident of his own strength, our blessed Saviour granted Peter his request. He ordered him to come to him upon the water.

Peter joyfully obeyed his divine Master; he left the boat, and walked on the surface of the sea. But the wind increasing, made a dreadful noise and the boisterous waves at the same time threatened every

moment to overwhelm him. His faith now staggered, his presence of mind forsook him; he forgot that his Saviour was at his hand; and in proportion as his faith decreased, the waters yielded, and he sunk. In this extremity he looked around for his Master; and, on the very brink of being swallowed up, cried "Lord, save me!" His cry was not disregarded by his compassionate Saviour; "he stretched forth his hand and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

Peter was convinced, before he left the ship, that it was Jesus who was coming to them on the water; nor did he even doubt it when he was sinking, because he then implored his assistance. But when he found the storm increase, and the billows rage more horribly than before, his fears suggested, that either his Master would be unable or unwilling to support him amidst the frightful blasts of the tempest.

His fears were therefore both unreasonable and culpable; unreasonable, because the same power that had enabled him to walk on the surface of the deep, was abundantly sufficient to support him there, notwithstanding all the horrors of the storm; culpable, because he considered his Master as unable to preserve him, or that he paid no regard

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

to his promise; for Jesus had virtually promised him his assistance when he granted his petition. This circumstance should teach us not to be presumptuous and self-sufficient; not to rush on dangers, and fly in the face of opposition, unless there be a necessity for so doing. We should never refuse to undertake any action, however difficult, when the cause of Christ calls upon us; or abandon the paths of virtue from a fear of the resentment of the children of this world: but we should, at the same time, be careful not to go farther than necessity obliges us, lest, like Peter, we repent our own temerity.

This miracle alarmed the disciples, for though they had so very lately seen the miracle of the five loaves, they did not seem to have before formed a proper idea of his power; but being now persuaded that he could be no other than the expected Messiah, they “came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.”—*Matt.* xiv. 33.

Our Saviour seems to have confirmed this miracle by working another; for the evangelists tell us, that he had no sooner entered the ship, and hushed the horrors of the storm, than they arrived at the place whither they were going. “Then they willingly received him into the

ship; and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.”—*John* vi. 21.

When our Lord disembarked, the inhabitants of the neighbouring country ran to him, bringing with them all those that were sick; and they were all healed. It must be remembered, that though Jesus ordinarily resided in the neighbourhood of Capernaum, yet he had been absent ever since his visiting Nazareth; and therefore it is natural to think, that the inhabitants, on his return, would not omit the opportunity of bringing their sick in such prodigious crowds, that it seems our blessed Saviour did not bestow particular attention on each of them; and this was the reason for their beseeching him, “that they might only touch the hem of his garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole.”—*Matt.* xiv. 36.

The virtue of that power by which he wrought these things lay not in his garments, for then the soldiers who seized them at his crucifixion, might have wrought the same miracles; but it was because Jesus willed it to be so. It was now the acceptable time, the day of salvation, foretold by Isaiah, and Christ's power was sufficient to remove any distemper whatsoever.

It has been mentioned, that our

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

blessed Saviour, after miraculously feeding the people, ordered them to disperse, and retire to their places of abode.

The former command they obeyed, but, instead of complying with the latter, they staid in the neighbourhood of the desert mountain; and observing that no boat had come thither since the disciples left their Master, they concluded that Jesus still continued in that place, and had no design of leaving his attendants. Hence they were persuaded, that though Jesus had modestly declined the honour of being made a king, he would accept it the next day; especially as they might fancy his disciples were dispatched to the other side, with no other intention than to prepare everything necessary for that purpose. Hopes like these animated them to continue in this solitary wilderness and take up their lodgings in the caverns of the rocks and mountains, notwithstanding their difficulties were greatly increased by the raging of the storm.

But no sooner did the cheering rays of light appear, than the multitude left their retreat, and searched for Jesus in every part of the mountain, to the summit of which they had seen him retire. Finding their search in vain, they concluded that he must have departed for the other

side, in some boat belonging to Tiberias, which had been forced by the storm to take shelter in a creek at the foot of the mountain. Accordingly, they repaired to Capernaum, where they found him in the synagogue, teaching the people; and could not help asking him, with some surprise, “Rabbi, when camest thou hither?”—*John* vi. 25

To this question our Lord replied, that they did not seek him because they were convinced by his miracles of the truth of his mission, but because they hoped to be continually fed in the same miraculous manner as before. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.” These are the views which induce ye to follow me: but ye are entirely mistaken; for happiness does not consist in the meat that perisheth, nor is it that sort of meat ye must expect to receive from the Messiah. Mere animal foods, which please and delight the body only, are not the gifts he came down from heaven to bestow; it is the meat that endureth to everlasting life, divine knowledge and grace, which, by renewing all the faculties of the soul, make it capable of enjoying eternal felicity: neither ought ye to follow the Son of man with any intention to obtain the meat that

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

perisheth, but in the hope of obtaining the meat that endureth to everlasting life. "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you; for him hath God the Father sealed."—*John vi. 27.*

The Jews, who were accustomed to the metaphors of meat and drink, as they are frequently found in the writings of their own prophets, to signify wisdom and knowledge, might easily have understood what our blessed Saviour meant by the meat "enduring to everlasting life." They, however, entirely mistook him; imagining that he spake of some delicious wholesome animal food, which would render them immortal, and which was only to be procured under the government of their great Master. It is therefore no wonder that his exhortation should so greatly affect them, that they asked him what they should do to erect the Messiah's kingdom, and obtain that excellent meat, which he said God had authorized him to give to his followers?

The Jews were elated with the prospect of the mighty empire the promised Messiah was to establish, and doubtless expected that Jesus would have bidden them first to rise against the Romans, vindicate their own liberties, and then establish in

every country, by the terror of fire and sword, the authority of that powerful Prince so long expected by the Jewish nation. To convince them, therefore, of their mistake, and inform them what God really required of them, towards erecting the Messiah's kingdom, Jesus told them, that they should believe on the person sent to them from the God of Jacob: but at this answer they were exceedingly offended. They were persuaded that he could not be the Messiah promised in the law and the prophets, who took no care to erect a temporal kingdom. And some of them, more audacious than the rest, had the confidence to tell him, that since he assumed the character of the Messiah, and required them to believe in him as such, it was necessary that he should perform greater miracles than either Moses or any of the old prophets, if he was desirous of convincing them that they ought to believe him the long-promised Messiah. "They said therefore unto him, What sign showest thou then, that we may see and believe thee? What dost thou work? Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat."—*John vi. 30.*

By extolling the miracle of the manna, by calling it bread from heaven, and by insinuating that this

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

miracle was wrought by Moses, the Jews endeavoured to depreciate both Christ's mission, and his miracle of the loaves. They considered this miracle as a single meal of terrestrial food, at which but a few thousands had been fed; whereas Moses had supported the whole Jewish nation, during the space of forty years, in the wilderness, by celestial food. To this objection the blessed Jesus replied, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world."—*John vi. 32, 33.* Moses did not give you the manna that fell around the camp in the wilderness, nor did it descend from heaven; it was formed in the regions of the air, by the omnipotent hand of the God of Jacob. But by the miracle of the loaves, my heavenly Father hath typified the true, the spiritual, the heavenly bread, which he himself giveth to the sons of men, and of which the manna was only a symbolic representation: the food that sustained the Israelites in the wilderness, was sufficient only for a single nation; but this, for all the children of men.

Many of the Jews, who listened with pleasure to his doctrine, and

having heard him describe the properties of the celestial bread, were animated with an earnest desire of being always fed with it. "Lord," said they, "evermore give us this bread:" to which the blessed Jesus answered, "I am the bread of life. He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."—*John vi. 35.*

Having made this answer to those who listened attentively to his doctrine, he turned himself to such as had heard him with prejudice, and took every advantage of wresting his words. You ask me, says he, to show you a sign, that ye may see and believe me to be the true Messiah. Surely you have seen it: you have seen my character and mission in the many miracles I have performed; miracles abundantly sufficient to convince you that I am really the Messiah, so often promised by the ancient prophets, so long expected by the whole Jewish nation. But, notwithstanding all these proofs, your hearts are still hardened; you expect a temporal prince, who shall raise the Jewish kingdom above all the empires of the earth; and because I do not affect the authority and pomp of an earthly monarch, you reject me as an impostor. Your infidelity therefore does not proceed from want of evidence, as you vainly pretend, but

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

from the perverseness of your dispositions, which may perhaps in time be overcome; for all those that the Father giveth me, however obstinate they may be for a season, will at last believe on the Son of God. Nor will I ever reject any that come to me, however low their circumstances may be, however vile they may appear in their own eyes, or however greatly their violence against my doctrines may have been exerted. I came down from heaven, not to act according to the common method of human passions, which excite men to return evil for evil, but to bear with them; to try all possible means to bring them to repentance; and to lead them in the strait paths of righteousness, which terminate at the mansions of the heavenly Canaan.

It is the fixed will of my Father to bestow eternal life on all who truly believe in me; and therefore I will raise them up at the last day.

As the prospect of the greatest part of the Jews extended no farther than temporal privileges and advantages, it is no wonder that they were offended at this doctrine; especially at his affirming that he was the bread of life, and that he came down from heaven. Was not this man, said they, born into the world like other mortals? And are we not acquainted with his parents? How

then can he pretend to come down from heaven.

But these degrading thoughts could not escape the censure of him to whom nothing is a secret. You need not, said the blessed Jesus, object to my birth, and the meanness of my relations, nor consider them as inconsistent with my heavenly extraction. For while you believe your teachers, who have so shamefully corrupted the oracles of Omnipotence, and filled your minds with the vain expectation of a temporal kingdom, you cannot believe on me. No man can believe on the Son of God, unless he be taught and assisted by the Father. You need not be surprised at this; for however you may imagine that all men, at the appearance of the Messiah, will flock to him with great cheerfulness, and become the willing subjects of his kingdom, without any aid from the Holy Spirit, the prophets plainly foretold the contrary: for they promise that men shall enjoy the teaching of the Father, in a far more eminent manner during the Messiah's kingdom, than under any preceding dispensation; consequently, persuasion, and the most earnest persuasion too, is necessary. You are not to understand, that by being taught of God, you are to see with your bodily eyes the invisible Jehovah, (because that privilege is con-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

fined to the Son alone,) but that you are to be taught by the Spirit of God whatever is requisite to your eternal interest, in and by me, who am the way, the truth, and the life.

Having thus asserted the dignity of his mission, and demonstrated that it really belonged to him, the blessed Jesus examined the comparison between himself, considered as the bread from heaven, and the manna which Moses provided for their fathers in the wilderness. The manna, said he, which your fathers ate in the desert, could not preserve them from temporal death: but the bread which came down from heaven will render men eternally happy. "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever. And the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."—*John vi. 51.*

Though the divine Teacher, on this occasion, made use of no other expressions than what the Jews had been accustomed to interpret in a figurative sense; yet, so great was their perverseness, that they considered them as spoken literally, and were astonished beyond measure at what he could mean, by saying he would give them "his flesh to eat." Jesus, however, knowing how unreasonable his hearers

were, did not proceed to explain himself more particularly at this time. But persisting in the same figurative manner of expression, he repeated and affirmed more earnestly what he had before asserted. Except, said he, ye be entirely united to me by a hearty belief and practice of my doctrine, partake of the merit of that sacrifice that I shall offer for the sins of the world, continue in the enjoyment of my religion, and receive spiritual nourishment in those means of grace which I shall purchase for you by my death, ye can never enter the happy mansions of eternity. "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed."—*John vi. 54, 55.*

This is the bread which came down from heaven; a kind of bread infinitely superior to that of manna, both in its nature and efficacy. It is different in its nature from manna, because it is not to be eaten as your fathers did that food in the wilderness; they "ate manna, and are dead." It is different in its effect, because he that "eateth of this bread shall live for ever."

These particulars Jesus spake in the hearing of all the people, who attended the public worship in the synagogue of Capernaum; and,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

though most of the metaphors were very easy to be understood, yet they did not comprehend what he meant by "eating his flesh and drinking his blood:" a thing not only prohibited by the law of Moses, but also repugnant to the customs of all civilised nations.

Many, therefore, who had followed him, considered it as inconsistent and absolutely absurd. But Jesus answered, Are you offended, because I told you my flesh is bread; that it came down from heaven; and that you must, in order to have eternal life, eat my flesh and drink my blood? But what if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up bodily to heaven, from whence he was sent by his heavenly Father? You will then surely be persuaded that I really came from heaven; and at the same time be convinced that you cannot eat my flesh in a corporeal manner.

I never meant that you should understand the expression literally; my flesh in that case would be of no advantage to the children of men. The metaphor was only used to indicate, that you must believe in the doctrines which I preach; for to reveal these, I took upon me the vail of flesh, and assumed the nature of man. It is, therefore, more properly my Spirit that confers this life on the human race, and

renders them meet for immortal glory.

My doctrine may perhaps be ineffectual to some of you, because ye are desirous of perverting it, and from thence to form a pretence for forsaking me. I well know the secret recesses of every heart; and therefore told you, that no man can believe on me, except it be given him of my Father.

The self-sufficient, self-righteous Jews were so offended at this discourse that many of them, who had hitherto been our Saviour's disciples, went out of the synagogue, and never came more to hear him. They found that all their pleasing views of worldly grandeur, and an extensive kingdom, could have nothing more than an ideal foundation, if they acknowledged Jesus to be the Messiah. And as they were unwilling to abandon all their favourite hopes of power, they refused to own him for the great Redeemer of Israel they had so long expected.

When the Jews were departed, Jesus turned himself to his disciples, and with a look of ineffable sweetness said to them, "Will ye also go away?" To this Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe, and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."—*John vi. 68, 69*

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Peter, in this reply, alluded to our Lord's declaration of himself, in which he says, that he was the bread of life—founding his faith in him as the Messiah.

But Jesus, to convince them that he was not ignorant of the most secret thoughts of the heart, nor afraid that his enemies should be spectators of his most retired actions, told him, that one of the twelve was a wicked man, and would be guilty of the vilest action. The prediction of Jesus was punctually verified, when Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve chosen disciples, basely betrayed his great Lord and Master.

CHAPTER XV.

Pharisaical Superstition severely reprimanded — The great Redeemer continues to display his Power and Benevolence in the Relief of several Objects of Affliction — Guards his Disciples against the prevailing Errors and Fallacies of the Scribes and Pharisees — Proceeds on the Works of his heavenly Father.

THE season of the grand Passover approaching, Jesus went up to Jerusalem, to attend that solemnity. But the Jews, being offended at his discourse in the synagogue of Capernaum, made an attempt upon his life. Our Lord, therefore, finding it impossible to remain at Jerusalem in safety, departed from that city, and retired into Galilee.

The Pharisees were sensible they could not perpetrate their malicious design upon him on that occasion, they therefore followed him, hoping to find something by which they might accuse him; and at length ventured to attack him for permitting his disciples to eat with unwashed hands, because, in so doing, they transgressed the tradition of the elders.

Moses had, indeed, required external cleanness as a part of their religion; but it was only to signify how careful the servants of the Almighty should be to purify themselves from all uncleanness, both of flesh and spirit. These ceremonial institutions were, in process of time, prodigiously multiplied; and the Pharisees, who pretended to observe every tittle of the law, considered it as a notorious offence to eat bread with unwashed hands, though, at the same time, they suffered the more weighty precepts of the law to be neglected and forgotten.

To expose the absurdity of such superstitious customs, our Saviour applied to them the word of the prophet Isaiah, "This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." Adding, that all their worship was vain, and displeasing to the Almighty, while they praised themselves, and imposed upon others the frivolous precepts

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

of man's invention, and at the same time neglected the eternal rules of righteousness; and to remove all objections that might be brought against this imputation of gross profaneness in the Pharisees, he supported it by a very remarkable instance.

God, said the Saviour of the world, hath commanded children to honour their parents, and to maintain them when reduced to poverty by sickness, age or misfortunes; promising life to such as obey this precept, and threatening death to those who disregard it. But, notwithstanding the peremptory commandment of Omnipotence, you teach, that it is a more sacred duty to enrich the temple than to nourish their parents, reduced to the utmost necessity; pretending, that what is offered to the great parent of the universe, is much better bestowed than what is given to the support of our earthly parents; making the honour of God absolutely different from the happiness of his creatures. Nay, ye teach that it is no breach of the commandment for a man to suffer his parents to perish, provided he has given what ought to nourish them to the temple of Jerusalem. Thus have ye concealed, under the cloak of piety, the most horrid, the most unnatural crime, any person can commit.

Having thus reproved the Pharisees, he called the multitude to him, and desired them to reflect on the absurdity of the precepts inculcated by the Scribes. These hypocrites, said he, solicitous about trifles, neglect the great duties of morality, which are of eternal obligation. They shudder with horror at unwashed hands, but are perfectly easy under the guilt of a polluted conscience, though they must be sensible, that "not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth; this defileth a man."—*Matt.* xv. 11.

The haughty Pharisees were highly offended at his speaking in a degrading manner of their traditions. And the apostles, who would gladly have reconciled their Master and the Pharisees, insinuated to Jesus that he ought to have acted in another manner. To which our Saviour answered, "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up."—*Matt.* xv. 13. As if he had said, you have no cause to fear their anger, as both they and their doctrine shall perish together, for neither of them came from God. Adding, "Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."—*Matt.* xv. 14.

His disciples, not fully comprehending this doctrine, desired their

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Master to explain it. This our Saviour complied with, and showed them that meats, being of a corporeal nature, could not defile the mind of man, or render him polluted in the sight of the Almighty, unless they were used to excess, or in opposition to the commandment of God; and even then the pollution arose from the man, and not from the meat. But, on the contrary, that which proceedeth out of the mouth of a man comes from his heart, and really polluteth his mind.

These doctrines of truth could not fail of irritating the Pharisees, as they tended to strip them of the mask with which they concealed their deformity, and rendered themselves so venerable in the eyes of the vulgar; and therefore their plots were levelled against his reputation and life.

Jesus, to avoid their malice, retired to the very borders of Palestine, to the coast of those two celebrated Gentile cities, Tyre and Sidon, purposing there to conceal himself for a time: but he could not be hid. It was as impossible for the "Sun of righteousness" to be concealed, where he came with his healing wings and message of peace, as it is for the sun in the firmament when he riseth in all his glory, "as a bridegroom cometh out of his chamber, and as a giant rejoiceth to

run his course." For a certain woman of Canaan, having heard of him, determined to implore his assistance. She was, indeed, one of the most abject sort of Gentiles, a Canaanite, one of that detested race with which the Jews would have no dealing, nor even conversation; but, notwithstanding all these discouraging circumstances, she threw herself, as an humble petitioner, on the never-failing mercies of the Son of God. Strong necessity urged her on; and insuperable distress caused her to be importunate. Alas! unhappy parent! her only daughter, her beloved child, had an unclean spirit, "was grievously vexed with a devil."

When her case was so urgent, and her woes so poignant, who can wonder that she was so importunate, and would take no refusal from this divine Person, who, she knew, was able to deliver her? Accordingly, she came; she fell at his feet; she besought him; she cried, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David, have mercy." I plead no merits; as a worthless, suffering wretch, I entreat only the bowels of thy mercy; I entreat it, for I believe thee to be the Son of David, the promised Messiah, the much desired Saviour of the world; have mercy on me, for the case of my child and her distresses are my own:

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

“My daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.”—*Matt.* xv. 22.

Is it not at the first view astonishing that such a petitioner should be apparently rejected, and that by a bountiful and merciful Redeemer, who kindly invited all that were heavy laden to come to him? who promised never to cast out any that would come, and whose business it was “to go about doing good?”

We, however, find he answered this woman not a word; he did not, in appearance, take the least notice, either of her or her distress. But this silence did not intimidate her; she still cried, she still besought, she still importunately pressed her petition; so that the very disciples were moved with her cries, and became her advocates. They themselves, though Jews, besought their Master to dismiss this petitioner; to grant her requests, and to send her away.

But Jesus soon silenced them, by an answer agreeable to their own prejudices; “I am not sent,” said he, “but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” To this the disciples readily assented; and, as they had a high opinion of the Jews’ prerogative, were so well satisfied with the answer, that we hear them pleading no more for this lost, this miserable Gentile.

But this soothed not her griefs: it was her own cause; and what is

immediately our own concern, animates us to the most zealous application. Somewhat encouraged that she was the subject of discourse between our Lord and his disciples, she ventured to approach the Saviour of the world, though she well knew that custom actually forbade such an intercourse; yet she came, she worshipped “this Son of David,” she confessed again his divinity, and prayed, saying, “Lord, help me!”

The compassionate Saviour now condescended to speak to her, but with words seemingly sufficient to have discouraged every farther attempt; nay, to have filled her with bitter dislike to his person, though she had conceived such high and noble notions of his mercy and favour: “It is not meet,” said he, “to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to the dogs.”—*Matt.* xv. 26. It is not justice to deprive the Jews, who are the children of the covenant, the descendants of Abraham, of any part of those blessings which I came into the world to bestow, especially to you who are aliens and strangers from the commonwealth of Israel.

This answer, though seemingly severe, could not shake her humility, nor overcome her patience; she meekly answered, “Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master’s table.”

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

—*Matt.* xv. 27. Let me enjoy that kindness which the dogs of any family are not denied: from the plenty of miraculous cures, which thou bestowest on the Jews, drop this one to me, who am a poor distressed heathen; for they will suffer no greater loss by it, than the children of a family do by the crumbs which are cast to the dogs.

Our Lord having put the woman's faith to a very severe trial, and well knowing that she possessed a just notion of his power and goodness, as well as of her own unworthiness, wrought with pleasure the cure she solicited in behalf of her daughter; and, at the same time, gave her faith the praise it so justly deserved "Oh! woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour."

—*Matt.* xv. 28.

After performing this miracle, Jesus returned to the sea of Galilee, through the region of Decapolis. In this country a man was brought to him who was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech. Objects in distress were always treated with benevolence by the holy Jesus: but as the people now thronged about him, in expectation that he would soon establish his kingdom, he thought proper to take the man, with his relations, aside from the

multitude; after which he put his fingers in his ears, and touched his tongue, that the deaf man, who could not be instructed by language, might know from whence all his benefits flowed. He then "looked up to heaven, he sighed, and said to him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain. And he charged them that they should tell no man."—*Mark* vii. 34, 35, 36.

But, notwithstanding they were enjoined to secrecy, the man, or his relations, published it in every part of the country, doubtless thinking they could not be too lavish in the praises of so great a benefactor; especially as the modesty with which he had performed the cure abundantly demonstrated that his sole view was the benefit of the human race.

This rumour gathered the multitude round him in Decapolis: for the fame of his miracles was extended to every corner of the country. He, therefore, to avoid the prodigious crowds of people, retired into a desert mountain, near the sea of Galilee. But the solitary retreats of the wilderness were unable to conceal the beneficent Saviour of the human race. They soon discovered his retreat, and brought to

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

him from all quarters the sick, the lame, the dumb, the blind, and the maimed. The sight of so many objects in distress so excited the compassion of the Son of God, that he graciously released them from all their complaints. Miracles like these could not fail of astonishing the spectators, especially those performed upon the dumb; for it must be remembered, that he not only conferred on those the faculty of hearing, and pronouncing articulate sounds, but conveyed at once into their minds the whole language of their country; they were instantly acquainted with the words it contained, their significations, their forms, their powers, and their uses, at the same time they enjoyed the habit of speaking it both fluently and copiously. This was surely enough to demonstrate to the most stupid, that such works could have been effected by nothing less than infinite power. "The multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see; and they glorified the God of Israel."—*Matt. xv. 31.*

The various works performed by the blessed Redeemer detained the multitude in the desert with him three days, during which time they consumed all the provisions they had brought into this solitary place.

But Jesus would not send them away fasting, lest any who had followed him so far from their habitation should faint in their return. Accordingly he again exerted his almighty power, to feed the multitude a second time in the wilderness.

It is highly worthy of our notice, the great wisdom of our blessed Saviour, in choosing to spend so great a part of the time he executed his public ministry, in the wilderness, and in solitary places. He did not seek the applauses of men, but the eternal salvation of their souls; and therefore often delivered his doctrines in the silent retreats thereof: in consequence of which he was followed by such only as had dispositions adapted for profiting by his instructions. It could not be supposed that many of different dispositions would accompany him into solitudes, where they were to sustain the inconveniences of hunger for several days successively, and be at the same time exposed to all the inclemencies of the weather. Those only who were desirous of instruction could, therefore, be expected to follow the blessed Jesus into those retired parts; and on those, doubtless, his doctrine distilled like dew, and like the small rain upon the tender herb. Happy mortals! who thus exchanged the shallow and frothy streams of folly, for the deep and salutary rivers of

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Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

eternal wisdom; who left the noise and bustle of a covetous bigoted people, for the calm instructions of the Son of God; and exchanged the perishing bread of this world for the "bread of life, the bread that came down from heaven!"

After feeding the multitude miraculously, Jesus retired into a district called Dalmanutha, a part of the territory of Magdala. Here he was visited by the Pharisees, who, having heard that he had a second time fed the multitude miraculously, were fearful that the common people would acknowledge him for the Messiah: and therefore determined openly and publicly to confute his pretensions to that character.

In order to do this, they boldly demanded of him a sign from heaven; for it must be remembered, that the Jews expected the Messiah would make his first public appearance in the clouds of heaven, and in a glorious manner establish a temporal kingdom. This opinion was founded on the following prophecy of Daniel, which they understood literally: "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations,

and languages, should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away; and his kingdom, that which shall not be destroyed."—*Dan. vii. 13, 14.*

It is therefore evident, that the Pharisees, by desiring him to show them a sign from heaven, meant that he should demonstrate himself to be the Messiah, by coming in a visible and miraculous manner from heaven, and wresting with great pomp the sceptre of David from the hands of the Romans.

If the minds of the Pharisees had been open to conviction, the proofs which Jesus was daily giving them would have been more than sufficient to establish the truth of his mission, and demonstrate that he was the long-expected Messiah.

But they were not desirous of being convinced; and to that alone, and not to want of evidence, or of capacity in themselves, it was owing, that they refused to acknowledge our Saviour to be the person foretold by the prophets. Their disposition was absolutely incorrigible; so that Jesus sighed deeply in his spirit, and declared that the sign they sought should never be given them; and that the only sign they were to expect was that of the prophet Jonas, or the miracle of his own resurrec-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

tion; a sign indeed much greater than any shown by the ancient prophets; and consequently a sign which demonstrated that Jesus was far superior to them all. "A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas."—*Matt. xvi. 4.*

Having thus reproved the impertinent curiosity of the Pharisees, he departed, with his disciples, and entered into a ship; and as they sailed he cautioned them to beware of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees, which he termed leaven, from its pernicious influence in filling the minds of men with pride, and other irregular passions: these hypocrites chiefly insisted on the observations of frivolous traditions, but neglected the true principles of piety, and hence filled the minds of their hearers with a high opinion of their own sanctity.

But the disciples having forgotten to take bread with them, understood that he intended to caution them against procuring it from the Heathens or Samaritans. They were so weak, as not to think that their Master, who had fed some thousands of people with five loaves, was also capable of providing for them in their necessities.

On his landing at Bethsaida, they brought unto him a blind man, de-

siring that he would heal him: Jesus accordingly took the man by the hand, and led him out of the city, and having spat upon his eyes, and put his hands upon him, asked him if he saw aught? To which the man answered, "I see men as trees walking." A very proper expression to convey an idea of the indistinctness of his vision. Jesus then put his hands again upon him, and he was restored to sight, "and saw every man clearly." It should be remembered, that the people of Bethsaida had, by their ingratitude, impenitence, and infidelity, greatly displeased the Saviour of the world: and this perhaps was the reason why Jesus would not perform the cure in the city, but led the man out into the adjacent plain. The people had also, for a long time, been solicitous that he would take upon himself the character of a temporal Messiah; and therefore he chose to perform this miracle without the city, to prevent their farther importunity, so incompatible with the modesty and lowliness of our dear Lord and Master.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER XVI.

The blessed Jesus delegates a special power to Peter, one of the Disciples—Pronounces the final Judgment of the World; and is afterwards transfigured upon the Mount.

JESUS having displayed his power and goodness in restoring the blind man to his sight, departed from Bethsaida, and retired into the territory of Cæsarea Philippi, where being desirous of proving in some measure the faith of the apostles, he asked them, saying, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" In answer to this question, the disciples replied, "Some say, that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets."—*Matt. xvi. 14.*

The people in general mistook the character of our Saviour, because he did not assume that outward pomp and grandeur with which they supposed the Messiah would be adorned. Jesus was therefore desirous of hearing what idea his disciples formed of his character, as they had long enjoyed the benefit of his doctrine and miracles; and accordingly asked them, What they themselves understood him to be? To this question Simon Peter replied, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Our Saviour acknowledged the

title; telling Peter, that God alone had revealed the secret to him. And in allusion to his surname Peter, which signifies a rock, our Saviour promised, that upon himself as the foundation, or upon the confession which Peter had just made of his being "the Christ, the Son of the living God," he would build his church, and that he should have a principal hand in establishing the Messiah's kingdom, never to be destroyed. "Other foundation can no man lay."—*I Cor. iii. 11.* On him may our souls rest, and the fiercest tempests shall rage in vain! "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church: and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven."—*Matt. xvi. 18, 19.*

Having delegated this power to Peter, our Saviour strictly forbade his disciples to tell any man that he was the Messiah; because it had been foretold by the prophets, that he should be rejected by the rulers of Israel as a false Christ, and suffer the pains of death. "Then charged he his disciples, that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Christ"—*Matt.* xvi. 20. Circumstances which could not fail of giving his followers great offence, as they did not yet understand the true nature of his kingdom, and therefore he thought proper to let every man form a judgment of his mission from his doctrine and miracles.

The foregoing discourse had doubtless filled the apostles' minds with lofty imaginations, and therefore our Saviour thought proper to acquaint them with his sufferings, in order to check any fond expectation of temporal power. Peter, however, was greatly displeased to hear his Master talk of dying at Jerusalem, when he had just before acknowledged the title of Messiah. Accordingly he rebuked him for the expression, which he was so bold as to think unguarded. But Jesus, turning himself about, said to Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence unto me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."—*Matt.* xvi. 23.

Peter's conduct, in this respect, arising from an immoderate attachment to sensual objects, our Saviour thought proper to declare publicly, that all who intended to share with him in the glory of the heavenly Canaan, must deny themselves; that is, they must be always ready to renounce every worldly pleasure, and

even life itself, when the cause of religion required it: he also told them, that in this life they must expect to meet with troubles and disappointments; and that whoever intended to be his disciple, must "take up his cross daily, and follow him."

Thus did the blessed Jesus fully explain to his disciples the true nature of the kingdom: and at the same time intimated, that though they had already undergone many afflictions, yet they must expect still more and greater, which they must sustain with equal fortitude, following their Master in the footsteps of his afflictions. This duty, however hard, was absolutely necessary; because, by losing their temporal life, they would gain that which was eternal: "For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it."—*Luke* ix. 24. "For what is a man profited if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"—*Matt.* xvi. 26.

To add to the weight of this argument, and to enforce the necessity of self-denial, our Saviour particularly declared, that a day was fixed for distributing rewards and punishments to all the human race; and that he himself was appointed by the Father as universal Judge; so

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

that his enemies could not flatter themselves with the hope of escaping the punishments they deserved, nor his friends be afraid of losing their eternal reward. "Whosoever, therefore, shall be ashamed of me and my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."—*Mark. viii. 38.*

To fortify the minds of his disciples, he informed them, that he would not appear to judge the world in his low and despised condition, but magnificently arrayed in both his own and his Father's glory; nor attended by twelve weak disciples, but surrounded by myriads of celestial spirits, with numberless hosts of mighty angels; nor should his rewards be the great offices and large possessions of a temporal kingdom, but the joys of immortality.

Let us now ruminate on the glory of the Judge, and the solemnity of the final judgment. He shall come in the majestic splendour of his glorified body, pompously arrayed with the inaccessible light, wherein Jehovah resides, and which, darting through, and enlightening the infinite regions of space with its ineffable brightness, shall make even the sun to disappear. Dressed in this awful manner, the great

Judge, attended by the whole celestial host, will "descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God,"—1 *Thess. iv. 16*, making heaven, earth, and hell to resound. The dead of all countries, and of all times, will hear the tremendous call. Hark! the living, filled with joy, exult at the approach of Omnipotence; or, seized with inexpressible horror, send up the most piercing cries, and are all changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye! The dead press forth from their graves, and follow each other in close procession! Behold—but, ah! nothing can behold; nothing can bear his presence! The heavens depart like a scroll, rolling itself together! Every mountain and every island is moved. The bond, the free, the rich, the great, captains and kings, to avoid the face of him that sitteth on the throne, the presence of the Lamb, rush beneath trembling mountains, and plunge into flaming rivers! but neither mountains nor flames will devour them, for they are raised immortal. Behold him, then, for all must behold him! even his eye, whose unthinking hand drove the nails at Calvary: nor heaven nor earth exist; stars and sun are vanished, lest they should darken the procession! Once the crucifixion of Jesus, and now

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

his glory, extinguishes the sun! Lo, hell, with what reluctance, comes forth for sentence! Lo, two worlds to be judged, and the third an assistant spectator! Behold! with what beauty, with what boldness, with what joy, some spring forward towards the judgment-seat. See, on the other hand, how amazed, how terrified, the wicked appear! with what vehemence they wish the extinction of their being! fain would they fly, but cannot! impelled by a force, by strong necessity, they hasten to the place of judgment: as they advance, the sight of the tribunal from afar strikes them with new terror. They approach in the deepest silence, and gather round the throne by thousands and thousands. In the mean time, the angels having gathered together the good from the uttermost parts of the earth, fly round the numberless multitudes, chanting melodious songs, and rejoicing that the day of general retribution is come, when vice shall be thrown from its highest post of usurpation, and virtue be exalted to the pinnacle of honour; when the intricacies of providence shall be unravelled, the perfections of the Almighty vindicated, the church of Christ, purchased by his blood, cleared from her iniquitous members, and everything which offendeth banished for ever.

Behold the books are opened, silence proclaimed, and every individual filled with awful consciousness, that he in particular is observed by the Almighty; so that not one single person can be concealed by the immensity of the crowd. The Judge, who can be biassed by no bribes, softened by no subtle insinuations, imposed upon by no feigned excuses, needs no evidences, but distinguishes with an unerring certainty. They separate! they feel their judgment in them, and hasten to their proper places; the righteous on one hand of the throne, and the wicked on the other. Behold, how beautiful with the brightness of holiness do the righteous stand at God's tribunal! their looks serene, and expressive of hopes full of immortality!

On the other hand, the wicked, confounded at the remembrance of their past lives, terrified with the bitter apprehensions of what is to come, hang down their dejected heads, and wish to hide themselves in the fathomless abyss! but all in vain; there is no escaping nor appealing from this tribunal.

Behold, with mercy shining in his countenance, the King invites the righteous to take possession of the kingdom prepared for them from the beginning of the world; but with frowns of anger drives the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

wicked to punishment which will have no end, no remission, no alleviation. What horror, what despair, must seize these wretched souls, when they see hell gaping, hear the devils howling, and feel the unspeakable torment of an awakened conscience. Now they seek for death, but find it not; would gladly be righteous, but it is too late.

The happy land of promise, formed by the hand of the Almighty, large, beautiful, and pleasant, a proper habitation for his people, and long expected by them as their country, now appears. Here all the righteous are assembled, forming one vast, one happy society, even the kingdom, the city, of God. Here Omnipotence manifests himself in a peculiar manner to his servants, wipes away all tears from off their faces, and adorns them with the beauties of immortality.

Here they drink a plenitude of joys from the crystal river, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, and eat of the fruit of the tree of life. Here there shall be no death, nor sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.

Happy day! happy place! and happy people! imagination faints with the fatigue of stretching itself to comprehend the vast, the unmeasurable thought!

As this doctrine of Christ being

appointed the universal judge might appear incredible at that time, on account of his humiliation, he told them that some who heard him speak should not taste of death, till they saw him coming in his kingdom. "Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom."—*Matt.* xvi. 28. There are some here present that shall not die till they see a faint representation of the glory in which I shall come at the last day, and an eminent example of my power inflicted on the men of this sinful generation.

To verify which prediction, the disciples lived to see their Master coming in his kingdom, when they were witnesses of his transfiguration, resurrection, and ascension, and had the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit conferred upon them; lived to see Jerusalem, with the Jewish state, destroyed; and the gospel propagated through the greatest part of the then known world.

About eight days after this discourse, our blessed Saviour, being with the multitude in the country of Cæsarea Philippi, left them in the plain, and, accompanied with Peter, James, and John, ascended an exceedingly high mountain.

In this solitude, while Jesus was praying with these three disciples,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

he was transfigured, his face became radiant and dazzling, for it shone like the sun in his meridian clearness. At the same time, his garment acquired a snowy whiteness, far beyond anything human art could produce; a whiteness bright as the light, and sweetly refulgent, but in a degree inferior to the radiance of his countenance.

Thus, as it were, for an instant, the Son of God, during his state of humiliation, suffered the glory of his divinity to shine through the vail of human nature with which it was covered; and to heighten the grandeur and solemnity of the scene, Moses, the great lawgiver of Israel, and Elijah, a zealous defender of the laws, appeared in the beauties of immortality, the robes in which the inhabitants of the heavenly Canaan are adorned. The disciples, it seems, did not see the beginning of this transfiguration; happening to fall asleep at the time of prayer, they lost that pleasure, together with a great part of the conversation which these two prophets held with the only begotten Son of God.

They, however, understood that the subject was his meritorious sufferings and death, by which he was to redeem the world; a subject that had, a few days before, given great offence to his disciples, particularly to Peter. At beholding the illus-

trious sight, the disciples were greatly amazed; but the forwardness of Peter's disposition prompting him to say something, he uttered he knew not what. "Master," said he, "it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias."—*Mark ix. 5.*

This disciple imagined that Jesus had now assumed his proper dignity; that Elias was come, according to Malachi's prediction, and the Messiah's kingdom was at length begun.

Accordingly, he thought it was necessary to provide some accommodation for his Master and his august assistants, intending, perhaps, to bring the rest of his disciples, with the multitude, from the plain below, to behold his matchless glory. This, he thought, was much better for his Master, than to be put to death at Jerusalem, concerning which Jesus had been talking with the Messengers from heaven, and the design of which Peter could not comprehend.

But "while he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and, behold, a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him."—*Matt. xvii. 5.*

When the three disciples heard the voice, which, like the roaring

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

thunder, burst from the cloud, and was such as mortals were unaccustomed to hear, they fell on their faces, and continued in that posture till Jesus approached, raised them up, and dispelled their fears, saying unto them, "Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only."—*Matt.* xvii. 7, 8.

Jesus having continued all night, with his three disciples, on the mountain, returned to the plain early in the morning, charging them to conceal what they had seen till after he was risen from the dead. He well knew that the world, and even his own disciples, were not yet able to comprehend the design of his transfiguration; and that if it had been published before his resurrection, it might have appeared incredible; because nothing but afflictions and persecutions had hitherto attended him. "He was truly a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."

But the doctrine of the resurrection, to which the transfiguration possibly alluded, was what the disciples were utterly unable to understand. They had never learnt that the Messiah was to die; far less that he was to be raised from the dead. They were, on the contrary, persuaded, that he was to abide for ever; and that his kingdom was to

have no end. They were also greatly surprised at the sudden departure of Elias, and could not comprehend what the Scribes meant by affirming that he must appear, before the Messiah would erect his empire. They, therefore, after long debating among themselves, asked their Master, "Why say the Scribes, that Elias must first come?" To which Jesus answered, that Elias should truly come first, according to the prediction of Malachi, and restore all things: but at the same time, he assured them that Elias was already come, and described the treatment he had met with from that stiff-necked people; giving them to understand, that he spake of John the Baptist. "But I say unto you, that Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed; likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist."—*Matt.* xvii. 12, 13.

CHAPTER XVII.

Our Saviour relieves a youth tortured with a dumb Spirit—Conforms cheerfully to the Custom of the Country, by paying the Tribute—Reproves the Pride of his Disciples, and delivers some excellent moral Precepts.

WHEN our Lord approached the descent of the mountain, ac-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

accompanied by his three disciples, he saw a great multitude surrounding the nine, who continued in the plain, and the Scribes disputing with them. The people seeing Jesus coming down from the mountain, ran to him, and saluted him with particular reverence. After which Jesus asked the Scribes, what was the subject of their debate with his disciples? To which one of the multitude answered, "Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit: and wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him; and he foameth and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples, that they should cast him out; and they could not."—*Mark ix 17, 18.*

This answer being made by one of the multitude, and not by the Scribes, to whom the question was directed, indicates that they had been disputing with the disciples on their not being able to cure this afflicted youth: perhaps their making this unsuccessful attempt had given the Scribes occasion to boast that a devil was at length found, which neither they nor their master were able to conquer. This seems to be indicated by the manner in which our Saviour addressed himself to these arrogant rulers. "O faithless generation," says he, "how long shall I be with you? how long shall

I suffer you?" Will no miracles ever be able to convince you? Must I always bear with your infidelity? You have surely seen sufficient demonstrations of my power, notwithstanding ye still discover the most criminal infidelity? After speaking in this manner to the Scribes, he turned himself to the father of the young man, and said, "Bring thy Son hither." But no sooner was he brought in sight of his deliverer, than the evil spirit attacked him, as it were, with double fury: "The spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed, foaming."—*Mark ix. 20.*

Jesus could easily have prevented this attack; but he permitted it, that the minds of the spectators might be impressed with a more lively idea of this youth's distress. And for the same reason probably it was, that he asked the father, how long he had been in this deplorable condition? To which the afflicted parent answered, "Of a child. And oft-times it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him; but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us."—*Mark ix. 21, 22.*

The inability of our Lord's disciples to cast out this spirit, had greatly discouraged the afflicted father; and the exquisite torture of his son, and the remembrance of its

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

long continuance, so dispirited him, that he began to fear this possession was even too great for the power of Jesus himself, as the Scribes had probably before affirmed; and therefore could not help expressing his doubts and fears. But Jesus, to make him sensible of his mistake, said to him, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." On which the father cried out, with tears, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." The vehement manner in which he spake causing the crowd to gather from every quarter, "Jesus rebuked the foul spirit;" saying unto him, "Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him."—*Mark ix. 25.*

No sooner was the powerful exit pronounced, than the spirit, with an hideous howling, and convulsing the suffering patient in the most deplorable manner, came out, leaving the youth senseless, and without motion; till Jesus, taking him by the hand, restored him to life, and delivered him, perfectly recovered, to his father.

The nine disciples, during this whole transaction, remained silent. They were doubtless mortified to think that they had lost, by some fault of their own, the power of working miracles, lately conferred

upon them by their Master; and for this reason were afraid to speak to him in the presence of the multitude. But when they came into the house, they desired Jesus to inform them why they failed in their attempt to heal that remarkable youth? To which Jesus answered, "Because of your unbelief." But to encourage them, he described the efficacy of the faith of miracles. "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove: and nothing shall be impossible unto you.—*Matt xvii. 20.* Nothing shall be too great for you to accomplish, when the glory of God and the good of the church are concerned, provided you have a proper degree of faith; even yonder mountain, which bids defiance to the storm, and smiles at the attacks of its mingled horrors, shall, at your command, leave its firm basis, and remove to another place.

The expulsion of the dumb spirit seems to have astonished the disciples more than any other miracle they had seen their Master perform; so that our Saviour found it necessary to moderate their high admiration of his works, by again predicting his own death, and retiring for a time into the unfrequented parts of Galilee.

But they could not comprehend

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

how the Messiah, who was to abide for ever, and was come to deliver others from the stroke of death, should himself fall by the hand of that universal destroyer. And because he spake of rising again the third day, they could not conceive the reason for his dying at all, and for his lying so short a time in the chambers of the grave. But though they were alarmed at this declaration, they remembered that he had often inculcated this doctrine, and reprimanded Peter for being unwilling to hear it.

After a short tour through the desert parts of Galilee, Jesus returned into Capernaum, the place of his general residence. Soon after his arrival, the tax-gatherers came to Peter, and asked him, whether his Master would pay the tribute? That disciple, it seems, had promised that Jesus would satisfy their demand; but, on a more mature consideration, feared to ask him concerning his paying taxes, on any pretence whatever.

Jesus was, however, no stranger to what had happened, and the fear of Peter to ask him; and therefore turned his discourse to this subject, by saying unto him, "What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers?" Peter saith unto him, "Of

strangers." Jesus saith unto him, "Then are the children free;" insinuating, that as he was himself the Son of the great King, to whom heaven, earth, and the sea belong, he had no right to pay tribute to any monarch whatever, because he held nothing by a derived right.

Or, if we suppose this contribution was made for the service and reparation of the temple, he meant, that as he was himself the Son of that omnipotent Being to whom the tribute was paid, he could have justly excused himself. But the blessed Jesus was always careful not to give offence; and therefore sent Peter to the lake, with a line and a hook, telling him, that in the mouth of the first fish that came up, he should find a piece of money equal to the sum demanded of them both. "Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money; that take, and give unto them for me and thee."—*Matt. xvii. 27.*

Our Lord took this extraordinary method of paying the tribute-money in this manner, because the miracle was of such a kind as could not fail to demonstrate that he was the Son of the great Monarch worshipped in the temple, and who rules the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

universe. In the very manner, therefore, of paying this tribute, he showed Peter that he was free from all taxes; and at the same time gave this useful lesson to his followers, that when their property is affected only in a small degree, it is better to recede a little from their just right, than to offend their brethren, or disturb the state, by obstinately insisting on it.

Notwithstanding our blessed Saviour had lately foretold his own sufferings and death, and though these melancholy accounts had greatly afflicted the minds of his disciples, yet their grief was of no long continuance; for within a few days they forgot the predictions of their Master, and disputed with each other about the chief posts of honour and profit in the Messiah's kingdom. This debate was overheard by the blessed Jesus, though he did not mention it till after the tax-gatherers were retired, when he asked them, what they were disputing about on the way? This question rendered them all silent. They were fearful of discovering the cause that had given rise to the debate, as they knew it would draw on them a reprimand from their Master. Jesus perceiving that they still continued silent, sat down, and ordered them all to stand around him, and attend to what he was

going to deliver. If any man, said the Saviour of the world, is ambitious of being the greatest person in my kingdom, let him endeavour to obtain that dignity by preferring others in honour, and doing to them all the good offices in his power. "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all."—*Mark ix. 35.*

The disciples were now convinced, that it was in vain to conceal the subject of the debate that had happened on the way; and accordingly they drew near to their Master, desiring him to decide a point which had often given occasion to disputes: "Who," said they, "is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"—*Matt. xviii. 1.* Jesus, to check these foolish emulations in his disciples, called a little child unto him, and placed him in the midst, that they might consider him attentively; and said unto them, "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."—*Matt. xviii. 3.* Unless ye be regenerated by the power of divine grace, and brought to a due sense of the vanity of all earthly preferments, riches, and honours, and become meek and humble in spirit, ye shall be so far from becoming the greatest in my kingdom, that ye shall never enter into it.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

But whosoever shall accept of the remedy provided, and receive with meekness all the Divine instructions, however contrary to his own inclinations, and prefer others to himself, that man is really the greatest in my kingdom. "Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."—*Matt.* xviii. 4.

Our Saviour, to demonstrate how truly acceptable the grace of humility is to the Almighty, took the child in his arms, declaring, that whoever humbled themselves like a little child, and showed kindness to their fellow-creatures for his sake, should have the same kindness showed them in the great day of account, especially if they performed these actions in obedience to his commands.

It appears, from circumstances, that James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were principally concerned in this debate; for we find that John endeavoured to divert it, by telling his Master they had seen one casting out devils in his name, and had forbidden him, because he did not join himself to their company. To which Jesus replied, that they should not have forbidden him, since he must have entertained very high notions of their Master's power, at seeing the devils leave the bodies of men,

on mentioning the name of Jesus "Forbid him not; for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name that can lightly speak evil of me."—*Mark* ix. 39.

You should, added the blessed Jesus, consider that every one that does not persecute us is a friend, and that the ejection of devils in my name will advance my doctrine, and promote my cause, even though the exorcist and the devils themselves should design the contrary. He also told his disciples, that the least degree of respect showed him by any one, even though it should be no more than the giving a cup of cold water to his thirsty disciples, was acceptable to him, and should not fail of meeting an adequate reward. "For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, He shall not lose his reward."—*Mark* ix. 41.

But, on the other hand, the least discouragement given to his disciples in the propagation of the gospel, come from what quarter it will, shall be punished with the greatest severity. "And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea."—*Mark* ix. 42.

From this saying Jesus inferred

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

that it was more advantageous to deny ourselves the highest enjoyments of this world, and to part with everything, however precious, represented by a hand, a foot, or an eye, than by these to cause the weakest of his friends to stumble. And as the disciples were appointed to sow the seeds of truth and religion in the world, or, according to the metayhor, to salt the people for an offering to heaven, in allusion to sacrifices being salted at the temple, Jesus exhorted them to mortify themselves; that they might appear worthy of so high an office as that of salting mankind for the altar of heaven: for as they were to be the salt of the earth, it was requisite they should themselves be filled with the spiritual salt of the graces, and particularly the holy salt of love and peace, that they might, as far as possible, be free from the rottenness of ambition, pride, contention, and every evil work.

Pride is the source of numberless sins: and therefore the blessed Jesus cautioned his disciples, in the most solemn manner, to beware of that vice; assuring them that the meanest child is an object of the care of Providence; and “that their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.” Our blessed Saviour did not mean, by this expression, that every man who

practises the duties of religion has a particular guardian angel assigned him; but as all angels are sent as ministering spirits, they may be called his angels.

To show the concern of his Almighty Father for the least of his reasonable creatures, and the great value he sets upon the souls of the human race, our Saviour told them, that he not only gave his highest angels charge concerning them, but had also sent his only begotten Son, to seek and to save that which was lost; and would share in the joy which the heavenly beings are filled with on their recovery. “How think ye? If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.”—*Matt.* xviii. 12, 13, 14.

Having thus addressed the offending party, he turned himself towards his disciples, and gave them instructions with regard to the offended. “If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone;

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouths of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.”—*Matt.* xviii. 15, 16, 17.

Try every measure to reclaim thy brother, and in order to this represent his fault to him privately. If this rebuke has the desired effect, thou hast brought him back to the paths which lead to happiness; but if this gentle method fail, two or more grave persons should join in the rebuke, that he may be convinced of the injury he has done thee. If he still remains obstinate, tell his offence to the church, whose sentence will sufficiently show that thou hast done thy duty, and that he alone is to blame. But if he be so hardened as not to be affected by the censure of the church, he is from thenceforth to be treated as the Pharisees treated the heathens and publicans; namely, as an incorrigible sinner, whose company and conversation being contagious, ought to be shunned by all who have any love for religion.

Our Saviour now conferred the special power which some think he

had before confined to Peter, on all his disciples. “Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.”—*Matt.* xviii. 18. That is, Ye have free power to excommunicate such offenders as will not be reclaimed by proper means, or to free from church censure those who are truly penitent; and such decree will remain valid in the court of heaven, though passed here below.

But, on the other hand, if the offending brother continue impenitent after all the methods above described are tried, his guilt is bound the faster upon him; because, by the precepts of the gospel, none but penitents can obtain pardon.

Our blessed Saviour also added, as an encouragement to good men, that if they continued earnest in their endeavours to bring sinners to repentance, and offered up their prayers to the Almighty for assistance, he would always grant their petitions, provided they were agreeable to the wise ends of his providence. “Again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them by my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

there am I in the midst of them.”
Matt.—xviii. 19, 20.

Peter had before heard his Master speak of the doctrine of frequent forgivenesses, and imagined that what he had now so strongly inculcated might prove dangerous to society; and therefore thought it his duty to offer his objections. “Lord,” said he, “how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?”—*Matt.* xiii. 21. He thought it a strange doctrine which obliged him to forgive offences seven times repeated: but our blessed Saviour told him, that he was very greatly mistaken; that he never intended to limit forgiveness to seven times, but that it ought to be extended even to seventy times seven.

This excellent moral precept he enforced by the parable of the two servants, debtors to one lord: in order to show the necessity of forgiving the greatest injuries in every case where the offending party is sensible of his fault, and promises amendment; because on this condition alone our heavenly Father will forgive our offences. “Therefore,” said the blessed Jesus, “is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.” God is the great King and Sovereign of all creatures, and all are accountable to him, as servants to a master.

He will reckon with all; and happy are they who live sensible of this important truth. When he had begun to reckon, one servant was brought unto him who owed him an immense debt, “ten thousand talents,” a debt much greater than he was able to pay. His lord, therefore, commanded him, agreeable to the custom of those times, to be sold for a slave, and “his wife and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.”

The servant, convinced of the justice of the sentence, and knowing he had nothing to hope for but from the mercy and clemency of his lord, fell down in the most humble manner and importunately besought him, saying, “Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.” The master, moved with compassion towards him, accepted of his humiliation; and, to make his happiness complete, loosed him from the sentence inflicted, and freely forgave him the enormous debt; an obligation, one would have supposed, sufficient to have melted the hardest heart into gratitude towards his lord, and the tenderest sympathy towards any of his brethren in distress. But, alas! who is acquainted with the human heart? This very servant went out from the presence of his compassionate lord, and found one his of fellow-servants

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

who owed him a "hundred pence;" a poor inconsiderable debt, in comparison of what he himself owed his lord.

But behold the inhumanity of this servant! he laid hands on the poor debtor, seizing him violently by the throat, and said, "Pay me that thou owest." His fellow-servant fell down at his feet, even just as he had before done at the feet of his lord, and besought him in the very same words he himself had so lately used, "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." Such a similarity of circumstances, one would have thought, must have affected his stony heart, brought to remembrance his own late distress, and melted his soul into the like generous compassion which had flowed so sweetly from his lord to him. But his conduct was the very reverse: he would have no patience, he would show no pity; he went and cast the unhappy debtor into prison till he should pay the debt.

His fellow-servants, when they saw what was done, were exceedingly afflicted; and came and told their lord the whole transaction. Upon which he summoned the unmerciful servant to appear before him; and, filled with indignation and abhorrence, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, how perverse is thy behaviour, how ungrateful

and base thy proceeding! "I forgave thee all that debt," that enormous debt thou owedst me, "because thou desiredst me;" I was moved to clemency and compassion by thy entreaties and distress: "and shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?" Shouldest not thou much rather have forgiven him, who was thy fellow-servant, and owed thee so small a sum, when I, thy king and lord, had forgiven thee so immense a debt?

Having thus expostulated with him, his wrath was kindled, and he "delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise," added the Son of God, "shall my heavenly Father do also so unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."—*Matt.* xviii. 34, 35. And surely this awful threatening ought to strike the minds of fierce and implacable men with terror: for, whatever they may think, it will certainly, in its full extent, be inflicted upon all who refuse to obey the dictates of Divine mercy, and to forgive not only their fellow-servants, but every brother in Christ, who through weakness or inadvertence may have done them an injury, either in person or property. How unreasonable and how odious does a severe and uncharitable temper

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

appear, when we view it in the light of this parable ! Let us then from this moment earnestly pray to be saved from every sentiment of rancour and revenge, nor ever allow a word, or even a wish, that savours of it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Our blessed Lord attends for the fourth time the Celebration of the Passover at Jerusalem—Addresses the Multitude at the solemn Feast of Tabernacles—Exempts the Woman detected in Adultery from the Punishment annexed by the Jews to that Crime—Escapes from the Snares laid for him by the inveterate Scribes and Pharisees.

THE great Redeemer, having promoted his Father's work in Galilee, departed into Judea, passing through the country beyond Jordan, that the Jews who inhabited those distant parts might enjoy the unspeakable benefits of his discourses and miracles. After sowing the seeds of eternal life, and publishing the glad tidings of salvation in those remote countries, he repaired to Jerusalem, to celebrate the fourth passover ; but the malignity of the Scribes and Pharisees was so great, that he staid but a short time in the capital ; and then returned into Galilee, while the multitude again resorted to him, and he again instructed them in the paths that lead to everlasting life.

The feast of the tabernacles now drew on, at which all the males of the Jewish nation capable of travelling repaired to Jerusalem, and dwelt in the tabernacles, or booths made of the boughs of trees, in commemoration of their fathers having had no other habitation during their forty years' sojourning in the wilderness. To this feast some of the kinsmen of the blessed Jesus desired he would accompany them, and there show himself openly to the whole nation of the Jews. They did not themselves believe that he was the great Prophet so long expected, and therefore condemned the method he pursued in his public ministry as altogether absurd.

They could not conceive what reason he had for spending so much of his time in the deserts, and remote corners of the kingdom, while he professed so public a character as the Redeemer of Israel. Jerusalem, the seat of power, was in their opinion much the properest place for him to deliver his doctrines, and work his miracles in the most public manner possible, before the great and learned men of the nation, whose decision in his favour would have great weight in increasing the number of his disciples, and inducing the whole nation to own him for the Messiah. "Depart hence, and go into Judea, that thy disci-





Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

ples also may see the works that thou doest. For there is no man that doeth anything in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly: If thou do these things, show thyself to the world. For neither did his brethren believe in him.”—*John* vii. 3, 4, 5.

Our Lord well knew the rancorous prejudice of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and therefore did not think proper to reside among them any longer than was absolutely necessary. They had more than once attempted his life, and therefore very little hopes remained that they would believe his miracles, or embrace his doctrine; but, on the contrary, there was great reason to think they would destroy him, if possible, before he had finished the work for which he assumed the veil of human nature, and resided among the sons of men. “My time,” said the blessed Jesus to these unbelieving relations, “is not yet come; but your time is alway ready. The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil. Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast; for my time is not yet full come.”—*John* vii. 6, 7, 8. As if he had said, It is not proper for me to go before the feast begins: but you may repair to the capital whenever you please; the Jews are

your friends, you have done nothing to displease them: but the purity of the doctrine I have preached to them, and the freedom with which I have reproved their hypocrisy and other enormous crimes, have provoked their malice to the utmost height, and, therefore, as the time of my sufferings is not yet come, it is not prudent for me to go so soon to Jerusalem.

There was also another reason why our blessed Saviour refused to accompany these relations to the feast of tabernacles: the roads were crowded with people, and these gathering round him, and accompanying him to Jerusalem, would doubtless have given fresh offence to his enemies, and have in a great measure prevented his miracles and doctrines from having the desired effect. He therefore chose to continue in Galilee, till the crowd were all gone up to Jerusalem, when he followed, “as it were in secret,” neither preaching, nor working miracles by the way; so that no crowd attended him to the feast.

As Jesus did not go up openly to Jerusalem, so neither did he on his arrival repair to the temple, and there preach openly to the people. This gave occasion to several disputes among the Jews with regard to his character. Some affirmed that he was a true prophet; and

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

that his absenting himself from the feast could be only owing to accident: while others as confidently asserted, that he only deceived the people, and paid no regard to the institutions they had received from heaven.

But about the middle of the feast Jesus appeared openly in the temple, and taught the people, delivering his doctrines with such strength of reason and elegance of expression, that his very enemies were astonished, knowing that he had never enjoyed the advantage of a learned education. "Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught. And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned."—*John* vii. 14, 15.

To which the great Redeemer of mankind replied, My doctrine was not produced by human wisdom; the sages of the world were not my instructors; I received it from heaven! it is the doctrine of the Almighty, whose messenger I am. "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me."—*John* vii. 16.

Nor can he who is desirous of practising the doctrines I deliver, if he will lay aside his prejudices, and sincerely desire to be taught of God, be at a loss to know from whom my doctrines are derived; because he will easily discern whether they are

conformable to the will of man or of God. It is no difficulty to discover an impostor, because all his precepts will tend to advance his own interest and gratify his pride; whereas, all the doctrines delivered by a true prophet have no other end than the glory of God, however contrary they may prove to himself. "He that speaketh of himself, seeketh his own glory; but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him."—*John* vii. 18.

Our Lord was upbraided with impiety by some of the Jews, because he had healed on the Sabbath the impotent man in one of the porches of Bethesda, which they pretended was a violation of the law of Moses, and consequently what no prophet would be guilty of. In answer to which our blessed Saviour told them, that however they might pretend to reverence the authority of Moses and his law, they made no scruple of violating the most sacred of his precepts: they had resolved to put him to death, directly contrary to every law of God and man; and, in order to execute their detestable scheme, were laying plots against his life.

The people replied, "Thou hast a devil: who goeth about to kill thee?" To which Jesus answered, I have done a miracle of an extraordinary

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

kind on the Sabbath-day, which you think inconsistent with the character of a pious man, and therefore wonder how I could perform it. But surely Moses gave you the law of circumcision, and you make no scruple of performing that ceremony on the Sabbath-day, because it is a precept both of Moses and the fathers. Since, therefore, ye think yourselves bound to dispense with the strict observance of the Sabbath, in order to obey a ceremonial precept; can you be angry with me, because, in order to fulfil the great end of all the divine law, I have cured a man who was infirm in all his members, and even with far less bodily labour than you perform the ceremony of circumcision? Consider, therefore, the nature of the thing; divest yourselves of your prejudices, and the superstitious opinions taught by your elders, and judge impartially. "Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision, (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers,) and ye on the Sabbath-day circumcise a man. If a man on the Sabbath-day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are ye angry at me because I have made a man every whit whole on the Sabbath-day? Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment."—*John* vii. 22, 23, 24.

Notwithstanding the strength of this argument, several of our blessed Saviour's inveterate enemies asked, with sarcastical surprise, If the boldness of Jesus, and the silence of the rulers, proceeded from their being convinced that he was the Messiah? and at the same time, to deride his pretensions to that high character, said, that they were acquainted both with his parents and relations; but that no man, when Christ appeared, would be able to tell from whence he came: founding their opinion on these words of the prophet Isaiah, "Who shall declare his generation?"—*Isaiah* liii. 8. To which the blessed Jesus answered, that their knowing his parents and relations was no reason against his having the prophetic character of the Messiah. Adding, I am not come of myself, but sent from heaven by God, who has uttered nothing by his servants the prophets concerning the Messiah, but what is true, and will all be fulfilled in me; but ye are totally ignorant of his gracious perfections and gracious counsels, and have no inclination to obey his just commands. You are really ignorant of what the prophets have delivered concerning the Messiah; for had you understood their predictions, you would have known that one of his principal characters is, to understand the perfections and

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

will of God more fully, and to explain them to the sons of men more clearly, than any other messenger ever before sent from the Most High. And would you attentively consider the doctrines I deliver, you would soon perceive this character remarkably fulfilled in me, and be convinced that I came from the Almighty God of Jacob.

This observation, however powerful, and his reasons, however solid, were far from disarming his enemies of their malice; for some of them were desirous of apprehending him; but Providence would not suffer any to lay hands on him, because the time of his sufferings was not yet come. Many of the people, however, convinced by the powerful miracles he had lately wrought, and the unanswerable reasons he had advanced in support of his character, believed on him, and affirmed publicly in the temple that he was the Messiah. "And many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?"—*John* vii. 31.

The Scribes and Pharisees were highly provoked at this attachment of the common people to Jesus; and accordingly, on the last and great day of the feast, they met in council, and sent several officers to apprehend him, and bring him be-

fore them. Jesus, during these transactions in the council, continued in the temple, teaching the people. My ministry, said he to the multitude, is drawing near its period; and therefore you should, during the short time it has to last, be very careful to improve every opportunity of hearing the word: you should listen with the greatest attention to every discourse, that your minds may be stored with the truths of the Almighty, before I return to my Father; for after my departure you shall earnestly wish for the same opportunities of seeing me and hearing my instructions, but shall never obtain them. "Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come."—*John* vii. 33, 34.

The Jews, who did not understand that our blessed Saviour alluded to his own death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of the Majesty on high, whether their sins would not permit them to follow him, wondered at this doctrine, and imagined that he intended to leave Judea, and preach to their brethren dispersed among the Gentiles. But this supposition was not sufficient: because if he did go and preach among the Gentiles, they thought it was not impos-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

sible for them to follow him thither. "Then said the Jews among themselves, Whither will he go, that we shall not find him? Will he go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles? What manner of saying is this that he said, Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come?"—*John* vii. 35, 36.

While the divine Teacher was thus instructing the people in the temple, the water from Siloam was brought in, according to the appointment of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, part of which they drank with loud acclamations, in commemoration of the mercy showed to their fathers, who were relieved by a stream which miraculously flowed from a rock, and refreshed a whole nation, then ready to perish with thirst in a dreary and sandy waste; and the other part they poured out as a drink-offering to the Almighty, accompanying it with their prayers, for the former or latter rain to fall in its season; the whole congregation singing the following passage: "With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation."—*Isaiah* xii. 3.

It was the custom of the blessed Jesus to deliver moral instructions in allusion to many occurrences that happened; and accordingly he took this opportunity of inviting, in

the most affectionate manner, all who were desirous of knowledge or happiness to come to him and drink, alluding to the ceremony they were then performing. And to encourage all such as were desirous of believing in him, he promised them the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which he represented under the similitude of a river flowing out of their belly. "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."—*John* vii. 37, 38.

During this discourse to the people, the officers from the council came to apprehend him: but hearing that the topic he was discussing was a very singular one, and he seemed to deliver his discourse with remarkable fervour, their curiosity induced them to listen some time to his discourse, before they laid hands on him. But the eloquent manner in which he delivered his subject appeased their rage: the sweetness of his pronunciation, and the plainness and perspicuity of his discourse, elucidated the beauties of truth, and caused them to shine before the understanding with their native lustre. Accordingly, his very enemies, who were come from the council on purpose to apprehend him, were asto-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

nished : the greatness of the subject, made, as it were, visible by the divine speaker, filled their understandings ; the warmth and tenderness with which he delivered himself, penetrated their hearts ; they felt new and uncommon emotions, and, being overwhelmed with the greatness of their admiration, were fixed in silence and astonishment ; they condemned themselves for having undertaken the office, and soon returned to the rulers of Israel without performing it.

If our Lord had pleaded for his life before the officers of the council who were sent to apprehend him, the success of his eloquence, even in that case, had been truly wonderful ; but in the case before us it surely was superior to all praise, for in a discourse addressed to others, and even on a spiritual subject, it disarmed a band of inveterate enemies, and made them his friends.

Nor were the officers the only persons affected by this discourse ; for many of them declared that he must be one of the old prophets ; and others, that he was no other than the Messiah himself. Some, however, led away with the common mistake that he was born at Nazareth, asked, with disdain, if the Messiah was to come out of Galilee ? and whether they would acknowledge a Galilean for the Messiah,

when the Scripture had absolutely declared that he was to be born in Bethlehem, the native town of his father David ? “ Many of the people, therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee ? Hath not the Scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was ? ” — *John* vii. 40, 41, 42.

Such were the dissensions on this subject, that some of his enemies, knowing that the officers were sent to apprehend him, threatened to lay hands on him ; but the Almighty would not suffer them to execute their wicked design. “ And some of them would have taken him ; but no man laid hands on him. ” — *John* vii. 44.

The officers now returned to the council, and were asked why they had not brought Jesus of Nazareth ? To whom the officers answered, “ Never man spake like this man. ” This reply enraged the council, who reviled them for presuming to entertain a favourable opinion of one whom they had pronounced an impostor. It is strange, said they, that you, who are not ignorant of our sentiments concerning this person, should entertain a favourable idea of him. Have any persons of

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

rank, or celebrated for their knowledge of the laws, believed on him? Are not his followers the lower order of the people, who are totally ignorant of all the prophecies concerning the Messiah?

The officers made no answer to these railing accusations of their masters; but Nicodemus, a member of the council, arraigned their conduct in a very poignant manner: Does our law (says he), condemn any man before he has been heard? They had before condemned their officers for being ignorant of the law, when it appeared they were themselves far more ignorant in pretending to condemn a person before they had proved him guilty. They were acting directly contrary to the fundamental principles of the law of equity, at the time they boasted of their profound knowledge of its precepts.

Incensed at this reprimand of Nicodemus, they asked him, with an air of disdain and surprise, if he was also one of those mean persons who had joined together to support the pretences of a Galilean? though the Scripture had plainly said, that Bethlehem was the place of the Messiah's nativity: adding, that if he refused to listen to them, he should be soon convinced that the great prophet mentioned by Moses was not to be born in Galilee. "Art

thou also of Galilee? Search and look; for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet."—*John vii. 52.*

Having made this reply to Nicodemus, the council broke up, and Jesus, who well knew their malicious intentions, retired to the Mount of Olives, where he spent the night with his disciples.

Our blessed Lord early the following morning returned to the temple, and again taught the people. The Scribes and Pharisees now determined to render him odious to the multitude, or obnoxious to the Roman governor; and therefore placed before him a woman that had been taken in the act of adultery, desiring his opinion what punishment she ought to suffer. "This woman," said they to Jesus, "was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?"—*John viii. 4, 5.*

Had our Lord disapproved the sentence of the law, they would doubtless have represented him to the multitude as a person who contradicted Moses, and favoured adultery; which could not have failed of rendering him odious to the people. On the other hand, had he ordered her to be stoned, it would have afforded a plausible pretence for accusing him to the Roman governor as a person who stirred up

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

the people to rebellion, the Romans having now taken the power of life and death into their own hands.

But Jesus, who well knew their malicious intentions, made them no answer, but “stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not.”—*John* viii. 6.

They, however, still continued pressing him to give an answer, and, at last, Jesus, in allusion to the law, which ordered that the hands of the witnesses, by whose testimony an adulterer was convicted, should be first upon him, said, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” Let those who are remarkably zealous for having justice executed upon others, at least take care to purify themselves from all heinous crimes.

This reply had its desired effect. The hypocritical Scribes and Pharisees were convicted of sin by their own consciences; so that they immediately retired, fearing Jesus would have made their particular sins public. “And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last.”—*John* viii. 9.

The woman’s accusers being all retired, Jesus told her, that as no man had pronounced sentence of death upon her, neither would he

pronounce it: but advised her to be very careful, for the future, to avoid the temptations which had induced her to commit so black a crime.

The wisdom, knowledge, and power of our blessed Saviour were eminently displayed on this occasion: his wisdom, in defending himself against the malicious attempts of his enemies; his knowledge, in discovering the secrets of their hearts; and his power, in making use of their own consciences to render their artful intentions abortive. It was therefore with remarkable propriety that the great Redeemer of mankind now called himself the “light of the world;” as it he had said, I am the spiritual sun, that dispels the darkness of ignorance and superstition, in which the minds of men are immersed, and discovers the path that leads to eternal life; nor shall any who follow me ever be involved in darkness. “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”—*John* viii. 12.

This assertion of our Lord highly provoked the Pharisees, who told him he must be a deceiver, because he boasted of himself. To which the great Redeemer of mankind replied, You are not to imagine that I called myself the light of the



"The Woman taken in Adultery."

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

world from a principle of pride and falsehood; that title justly belongs to me: nor would you yourselves refuse to acknowledge it, did you know from what authority I received my commission, and to whom, when I have executed it, I must return. But of these things ye are totally ignorant, and therefore judge according to outward appearance, and condemn me because I do not destroy those who oppose me, as you vainly think the Messiah will do those who shall refuse to submit to his authority. But the design of the Messiah's coming is very different from your mistaken notions; he is not come to destroy, but to save the children of men. "Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true; for I know whence I came, and whither I go: but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go. Ye judge after the flesh, I judge no man." — *John* viii. 14, 15. He added, that if he should condemn any person for unbelief, the condemnation would be just, because his mission was true, being confirmed by his own testimony and that of his almighty Father, the God of Jacob, by whose authority, and agreeable to whose will, all his sentences would be passed. "And yet if I judge, my judgment is true for I am not alone, but I and

the Father that sent me" — *John* viii. 16.

Having thus asserted the divinity of his mission, and shown that his judgment was just, he proceeded to inform them that his Father himself bare witness to the truth of his mission. You cannot, said he, justly complain, even if I should punish you for your unbelief, because you are, by your own laws, commanded to believe the testimony of two witnesses, that my mission is evidently true. For the actions of my life, which are perfectly agreeable to the character of a messenger from heaven, bear sufficient witness of me; and the Father, by the miracles he has enabled me to perform, beareth witness of me: ye are therefore altogether culpable in objecting to my mission. "It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. I am one that beareth witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me." — *John* viii. 17, 18.

The Jews then asked him, Where is thy Father, the other witness to whom thou appealest? Jesus replied, Your conduct sufficiently demonstrates that ye are strangers both to me and my Father; for had ye known who I am, ye must have also known who it is I call my Father; had ye been convinced that

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

I am the Messiah, you must also have been convinced that the Father is no other than that omnipotent Being who created and upholds all things by the word of his power. "Then said they unto him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye neither know me nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also."—*John viii. 19.*

This discourse, the evangelist tells us, was held in the treasury, a court of the temple, where the chests were placed for receiving the offerings of all who came up to worship in the temple; and therefore must have been a place of great resort, being frequented by all, even the priests and rulers. But notwithstanding the public manner in which our blessed Saviour now asserted his claim to the character of the Messiah, no man attempted to seize him; Providence not suffering them to put their malicious designs in execution, because his hour, or the time of his sufferings, was not yet come.

The debate being ended, Jesus again repeated what he had before told them; namely, that he should shortly depart from them; and that they should then seek him, but not be able to find him. "I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I

go ye cannot come."—*John viii. 21.* As if he had said, After my ascension into heaven, when the Roman armies shall spread horror and desolation in every corner of the land, ye shall then earnestly wish for the coming of the Messiah, in expectation of being delivered by his powerful arm from your cruel enemy: but ye shall then find your mistake; ye shall die in your sins, and be for ever excluded from the mansions of happiness.

The Jews by no means comprehended this departure of which our Lord told them. They even fancied he would destroy himself, because they thought the only retreat where they could not find him was the gloomy habitation of the grave. To which the blessed Jesus replied, Your vile insinuation discovers at once the wickedness of your hearts, and the baseness of your original. Ye are from the earth, and therefore subject to all the evil passions that infect human nature; and from the dictates of your own hearts, you fancy that I can be capable of committing the horrid crime of self-murder. But my extraction is very different; it is from heaven; and, consequently, my mind is not tainted with the corruption of human nature, the source of temptation to every sin. You, therefore, must believe that I am the "bread of life,"

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

the heavenly manna, the light of the world, the true Messiah, if you are desirous of being cleansed from those pollutions which flow from your earthly origin : but if you still continue in your unbelief, “you shall die in your sins.”

The Jews now, in order to vindicate themselves, demanded what sort of person he pretended to be ? To which Jesus answered, “Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning,” that is, at the beginning of this discourse, “the light of the world.” Adding, “I have many things to say, and to judge of you : but he that sent me is true ; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him.” *John* viii. 26.

This discourse, however plain it may appear, was not understood by the perverse Jews ; they did not perceive “that he spake to them of the Father.” But Jesus told them, that when they crucified him they would be convinced, by the miracles accompanying that awful hour, the resurrection from the dead, the effusion of the Holy Spirit on his disciples, and the destruction of the Jewish nation, who he was, and the Father that sent him. “When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then ye shall know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself ; but as my Father hath taught

me, I speak these things.”—*John* viii. 28.

He added, that though he should be crucified as a malefactor, that punishment would not be inflicted on him as a consequence of his being deserted by his Father ; because he would never leave him in any period of his sufferings, or even at the hour of his death, as he always acted agreeably to his will.

These words induced many of the people to believe him to be the Messiah. Perhaps by “lifting him up” they did not understand his crucifixion, but his ascension to the throne of David ; and hence supposed that he now entertained sentiments worthy of the Messiah, and were therefore very ready to acknowledge him as such, and believe the doctrine he had delivered concerning his mission. But Jesus told them, that if they persevered in the belief and practice of his word, they should in reality become his disciples, have a title to that honourable appellation, be fully instructed in every doctrine of the gospel, and not only freed from the slavery of sin and its consequences, but also from the ceremonial laws delivered by Moses. “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed : and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”—*John* viii. 31, 32.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The Jews, on hearing him mention that they should be made free, answered, "We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man." This assertion, if taken literally, was absolutely false, the whole nation, at that very time, being in bondage to the Romans; nor were their ancestors any strangers to slavery, having severely felt the hand of tyranny, both in Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. The expression, therefore, according to some writers, must be taken in a metaphorical sense, to signify spiritual bondage; it was a freedom by truth, a freedom in respect of religion, which they now asserted. They meant that they were the descendants of illustrious ancestors; and, during the worst of times, had preserved sentiments in religion and government worthy the posterity of Abraham; nor had the hottest persecution of the Assyrian kings been able to compel them to embrace the religion of the heathens. In respect of truth, "We were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?"

In answer to this question, Jesus told them, that those who gave themselves up to the practice of sin, and the gratification of their sinful appetites, were absolute slaves; and how far they might deserve that appellation, it was incumbent on

them to consider. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." And as a slave cannot be assured of the continuance of his master's favour, or certain of abiding continually in the family; so my Father can, when he pleases, discard such habitual sinners, deprive you of the external economy of religion, in which you so highly boast; as you have, through sin, rendered yourselves bond-men to his justice. If ye are desirous of becoming the children of God, and of remaining for ever in his family, you must submit to the authority of his Son, and embrace his doctrine, which will induce him to adopt you as co-heirs with himself. It is he only that can make you free indeed, and place you in the city of the heavenly Jerusalem, without the least danger of being removed. I well know that you are in a natural sense the seed of Abraham, but in a moral one the offspring of Satan; for many of you are desirous of destroying me, because I enjoin a greater degree of sanctity than you are willing to acquire. "I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. I speak that which I have seen with my father; and ye do that which you have seen with your father. They answered and said

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

unto him, Abraham is our father.”
—*John* viii. 37, 38, 39.

Notwithstanding their claim to immediate descent from that father of the faithful, Jesus told them, that if they were the spiritual progeny of Abraham, they would resemble that great and good man in his righteousness; and therefore, instead of endeavouring to take away the life of a person who came with a revelation from God, they would believe on him, in imitation of Abraham, who was justly styled the father of the faithful, and the friend of God. “If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God; this did not Abraham.”—*John* viii. 39, 40.

Jesus added, that their deeds sufficiently showed whose children they were, and from what stock they were descended; even from the great deceiver of mankind: who “goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”

The Jews at length discovered the purport of our Lord’s meaning, and accordingly replied, that they were undoubtedly in that sense the children of God, as they were certainly not born of fornication; alluding to the marriage-covenant which in Scripture is metaphorically said to subsist between God and the

people of Israel, and by which their obligation to love, honour, and obey him was represented in a very lively manner. We are neither, said the Jews, idolatrous ourselves, nor sprung from idolatrous parents; consequently we are, with respect to a spiritual descent, the children of God. “We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God.”—*John* viii. 41.

But Jesus told them, that an outward profession of the true religion was of no consequence. They must “love it in deed and in truth,” if they hoped to be in reality the children of God: and if they truly loved religion, they must love him who came down from heaven on purpose to reveal it to the sons of men. Adding, that he did not come of himself, but was sent by the great Creator of the universe. “If God were your Father, ye would love me; for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.”—*John* viii. 42.

But ye, continued the blessed Jesus, inherit the nature of your father the devil; and therefore will continue to gratify the lusts ye have derived from him. He was an enemy to and a murderer of mankind from the beginning, and has ever since exerted his whole power to work their destruction; some-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

times by seducing them into sin by his falsities, and sometimes by instigating them to kill those whom God thought proper to send to reclaim them. And having early departed from holiness and truth, a custom of lying is become habitual to him. Being therefore a liar, and the father of lying, when he speaketh a falsity he speaketh what is properly his own. But I tell you the truth: and therefore it is natural to think that ye will disbelieve me. "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do: he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not."—*John* viii. 44, 45.

Though ye dare even to reject my doctrine, are any of you able to show that I have not received my commission from heaven, or that I have done anything that has a tendency to render me unworthy of belief? Can you show that I have taught false doctrines, reproved you unjustly for your actions, or been guilty myself of sin? If you are unable to do this, but, on the contrary, must acknowledge that my doctrine and life are such as become a messenger of God, what reason

can ye pretend for not believing me? "And if," in affirming that I am perfectly free from sin, "I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?" Whoever is of God, receives with the greatest humility whatever revelations God is pleased to make of himself by his messengers, and makes it his study and delight to obey all his commandments. But ye reject the revelations and precepts of the Almighty, delivered by me, who came down from heaven, for no other reason than because ye are not the children of God. "He that is of God, heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God."—*John* viii. 47.

The Jews, still attached to their lineal descent, replied, that his calling the descendants of Abraham the children of the devil, was a sufficient proof that he was either a very profligate wretch himself, or instigated by some evil spirit. But Jesus told them he was neither mad nor actuated by an evil spirit. On the contrary, he honoured his Father, by speaking the words of truth, which he had sent him to deliver; and therefore they dishonoured him in calling him by so opprobrious a title. Adding, that he sought not their applause, but referred their conduct to an omniscient and impartial Judge. "And I seek not my own glory: there is one

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

that seeketh and judgeth.”—*John* viii. 50.

Our Lord having declared his mighty and divine power, asserts the happy effects of faith and obedience to the gospel. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.”—*John*. viii. 51. On this declaration, the Jews (who were total strangers to our Lord’s spiritual meaning of death) cried out, Now we sufficiently know that thou art possessed with a devil; for the most righteous persons that ever flourished among the sons of men are dead: Abraham and the prophets, and other holy men, are all laid in the chambers of the dust: and thou hast the impudence and folly to affirm, that whoever keeps thy precepts shall never die. Thou surely canst not think nor pretend to be more in favour with the Almighty than Abraham and the prophets were, who, though the strictest observers of the divine precepts, could not obtain the privilege of being themselves exempt from the stroke of death, much less for their followers. “Now we know that thou hast a devil: Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death. Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead:

whom makest thou thyself?”—*John* viii. 52, 53.

In reply to this impertinent query, the Messiah returned, If I should attempt to speak in praise of myself, you would call it vain and foolish, and, like the Pharisees, tell me, “Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true.” Instead, therefore, of giving you a full description of my dignity, I shall only inform you, that it is my Father who speaketh honourably of me, by the many miracles he enables me to perform. And surely this may be sufficient to convince you of what I have promised to my disciples; especially when I tell you that my Father is no other than the Almighty God of Jacob, whom all the descendants of Abraham pretend to worship. But though you vainly boast of worshipping my Father as your God, you are ignorant of him; you neither form just conceptions of him, nor worship him in the manner you ought. Your knowledge and actions, therefore, disagree with your profession; but, on the contrary, I entertain proper ideas of him, and obey his precepts. You may, perhaps, construe this declaration as proceeding from vanity; but if I should say, I do not form adequate conceptions of him, or acknowledge him as he deserves, I should be a liar like unto

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

you. Even your father Abraham, of whom you so highly boast, earnestly desired to behold the time when I, the promised seed, should put on the vail of human nature, and convert the nations of the world from their ignorance and idolatry to the knowledge and worship of the true God. He earnestly desired to see the great transactions of my life by which this invaluable blessing was to be procured for all the sons of men, and view the happy state of all nations when this blessing was bestowed upon them. This was granted him; he “saw it, and was glad.” He was favoured with the ravishing prospect of these happy times, then concealed in the womb of futurity, and was exceedingly transported with the scene. “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad.”—*John* viii. 56.

The Jews, still blind to the spiritual meaning of our Lord's words, concluded he had affirmed that he was before Abraham; and knowing he was not yet fifty years old, considered it as absolutely ridiculous. They had no conception of his divine nature, though he had so often told them he was the Son of God, and consequently existed with the Father before this world was called from its primitive chaos. This gross stupidity and perverseness induced the Sa-

viour of the world to assert his dignity in still plainer terms; “Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am.”—*John* viii. 58.

The Jews, incensed at our Lord's prior claim to Abraham in point of existence, rushed on him, and attempted to stone him; but Jesus, by miraculously concealing himself, passed unhurt through the crowd, and retired out of the temple.

With what patience did our blessed Redeemer bear, and with what meekness of wisdom did he answer, the most virulent and opprobrious language! And shall we too keenly resent the reflections which are thrown upon us? May but our conscience witness for us, and we need not fear all that are against us!

CHAPTER XIX.

Our Lord continues to work Miracles in Confirmation of his Mission and Doctrine—Calls forth and sends out seventy Disciples—Preaches to the People of Judea, by way of Parable.

THE great Preacher of Israel, I having defeated the cruel designs of the obstinate Jews, in passing on his way saw a man who had been blind from his birth. The sight of so affecting an object could not fail to excite the compassion of the benevolent Saviour of mankind. Nor could the affronts and indignities he

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

had just received from the Jews hinder him from "working the works of him that sent him," and dispensing blessings on that rebellious and ungrateful nation. Accordingly, he beheld this poor blind man, not with a transient view, but fixed on him the eyes of pity, and presented him with the riches of his adorable love.

The disciples observing the affectionate regard of their Master to this object of compassion, and probably imagining that he was going to extend his usual mercy to this unfortunate object, asked their Master whether his blindness was occasioned by his own sin, or the sin of his parents? They had often heard their Master say, that afflictions were commonly the punishment of particular sins; and had learned, from the law of Moses, that sin was the fruitful source of evil; and that the Lord punished the iniquities of the fathers upon the children. Their Master kindly answered, that neither his own nor the sins of his parents were the immediate cause of this peculiar affliction; but that he was born blind, "that the works of God should be made manifest in him;" particularly his sovereignty in bringing him blind into the world, his power in conferring the faculty of sight upon him, and his goodness in bearing witness to the

doctrine by which men are to be saved.

We may learn by this pertinent reply of the Saviour of the world, that a curious inquiry into the cause of afflictions in other men may be safely avoided; and that we ought to suppose every calamity subservient to the glory of Omnipotence; never imputing to their personal sins whatever miseries we behold in others, lest, like the disciples in the present case, we assign to sin what owes its origin to the glory of our Maker.

Having assigned the cause of this person's blindness, namely, "that the works of God should be made manifest in him," Jesus added, "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work" — *John ix. 4*, intimating to his disciples, and all the sons of men, his unwearied labour in the work of his almighty Father. In this he was employed day and night, during the time of his sojourning in the flesh. To this alone he directed all his thoughts and all his intentions. This he esteemed even as his meat and drink: and for this he suffered the neglect of his ordinary food, that he might finish the blessed, the beneficent work of human salvation. A work, to accomplish which he left the courts of heaven; and

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

during the execution of it went about doing good.

It was now the Sabbath-day, and the blessed Jesus was going to perform a miracle in which there was to be a small degree of servile work : and therefore he told his disciples that they need not be surprised to see him work miracles of that kind on the Sabbath-day. For though they should imagine that he might defer them till the day of rest was over, his time on earth was so short that it was necessary for him to embrace every opportunity that offered of working miracles. Perhaps he chose to perform this work on the Sabbath because he knew the Pharisees would, for that reason, inquire into it with the utmost attention, and consequently render it more generally known.

But however this be, our blessed Saviour, who was now going to confer sight on one that was born blind, took occasion from thence to speak of himself as one appointed to give light also to the minds of men involved in darkness. "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."—*John xi. 5.*

It appears from hence, that our Saviour's miracles were designed not only as proofs of his mission, but also as specimens of the power he possessed as the Messiah. For example, by feeding the multitude

with the meat that perisheth, he signified that he was come to quicken and nourish mankind with the "bread of life," that sovereign cordial and salutary nutriment of the soul. His giving sight to the blind, was a lively emblem of the efficacy of his doctrine to illuminate the blinded understandings of men. His healing their bodies, represented his power to heal their souls, and was a specimen of his authority to forgive sins, as it was a real, though a partial, removal of its punishment. His casting out devils, was an earnest of his final victory over Satan and all his powers. His raising particular persons from the dead, was the beginning of his triumph over death, and a demonstration of his ability to accomplish a general resurrection : and, in a word, his curing all promiscuously who applied to him, showed that he was come, not to condemn the world, but to save even the chief of sinners. Accordingly, at or soon after performing these miracles, when the memory of them was fresh in the minds of his hearers, we often find him turning his discourse to the spiritual things they represented.

Having declared the salutary design of his coming into the world, "he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

the clay, and said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam (which is by interpretation, Sent). He went his way, therefore, and washed, and came seeing."—*John ix. 6, 7.*

From former examples, it is evident that our blessed Saviour could as easily have performed this miracle without the assistance of any external means. Indeed, those the great Redeemer of mankind made use of on this occasion were so far from being likely to effect the cure, that they seemed properly adapted to produce a quite contrary effect. We must, therefore, conclude that they were intended to direct our attention to higher mysteries, and show us, as in a glass, that it was through the same divine Power who at first created man out of the dust of the earth and gave sight to his eyes, that fallen men were now restored and regenerated, and the cement of sin which closed their eyes was wiped away.

This person seems to have known the power of the Redeemer, or at least to have been informed by some person near him who Jesus was, the fame of whose miracles had been published in every corner of Judea. Indeed, we cannot otherwise account for the implicit and ready obedience paid him by the blind man; who was amply rewarded for his faith and confidence by

receiving the invaluable gift of sight.

This miraculous operation could not fail of producing a general curiosity and surprise: it induced those who had seen this blind man in his dark and deplorable condition, to be very particular in their inquiries into the means of so singular a miracle. It was doubtless the subject of general conversation; and it is natural to think should also have proved the means of a general conversion; but, as it too frequently happens, a perverse curiosity prevented its salutary effects upon their souls. Unbelief and hardness of heart led some of them even to doubt of the plainest fact; a fact the most evident and indisputable, and plainly the work of the Divinity: and others to persecute at once both the object and the author of it! "The neighbours, therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and begged? Some said, this is he: others said, He is like him: but he said, I am he."—*John ix. 8, 9.*

The man, transported with gratitude and joy, and perceiving his neighbours to doubt of the identity of his person, proclaimed himself to be the very same whom they lately saw begging in total darkness. I am he thus wonderfully blest with

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

sight, by the peculiar mercy of the Almighty! I am he, who was blind from my birth, whom ye have all seen, and many relieved in my miserable distress! I am he who was, even from my mother's womb, involved in total darkness, but now enjoy the enlivening light of day!

So ingenuous an acknowledgment of the fact excited their curiosity to know how this admirable effect was produced. "How were thine eyes opened?" To this question he readily replied, "A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash; and I went and washed, and I received sight." — *John ix. 11.* They then asked him where the person was who had performed so stupendous a work? To which the man answered, "I know not:" for Jesus had retired while the man went to wash his eyes in the pool of Siloam, probably to avoid the applauses which would naturally have been given him, and which, we see through the whole Gospel, he generally studied to avoid.

The neighbours, either stimulated by envy, or excited by a desire of having the truth of this extraordinary event searched to the bottom, brought the man before the council, as the proper judges of this affair. Accordingly, he was no sooner placed

before the assembly, than the Pharisees began to question him, "how he had recovered his sight?" Not daunted by this awful assembly, though terrible to a man of his mean circumstances, he boldly answered, "He put clay on mine eyes, and I washed, and do see." — *John ix. 15.*

On hearing this account of the miracle, the Pharisees declared, that the author of it must be an impostor, because he had by performing of it violated the Sabbath-day. But others, more candid in their way of thinking, gave it as their opinion that no deceiver could possibly work a miracle of that kind, because it was too great and beneficial for any evil being to have either the inclination or power to perform.

The court being thus divided in their opinions with regard to the character of Jesus, they asked the man himself what he thought of the person who had conferred on him the blessing of sight? To which he boldly and plainly answered, "He is a prophet." But the Jews, wanting to prove the whole a cheat, started another objection, namely, that this person was not born blind, though all his neighbours had really testified the truth of it. Accordingly, they called his parents, and asked them, Whether he was their son? if he



Pool of Siloam.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

had been born blind? and by what means he had obtained his sight? To which they answered, that he was truly their son, and had been born blind; but with regard to the manner in which he received his sight, and the person who had conferred it on him, they could give no information; their son was of age, and he should answer for himself. "These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue."—*John ix. 22.*

This proves that the convictions of conscience act powerfully on the mind; the parents of this blind man well knew by what means their son had received his sight; and, like him, they should have glorified the divine hand that had wrought so marvellous a work, and dared to have confessed him before all men, whatever dangers might have threatened them. Let us learn from hence, to fear our own, and to pity human frailty, and to implore the assistance of the Holy Spirit, to give us courage and resolution in the day of trial; and let us take care not to love the praise of men more than the praise of God.

The Pharisees finding that all attempts, either to discredit or disprove the fact were useless, had

recourse to their usual method of calumniating the author of it. They called again "the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner."—*John ix. 24.* To which the man boldly answered these rulers of Israel, "Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."—*John ix. 25.*

This reply prevailed not with the obstinate Jews; they were desirous of confounding him with repeated questions and the art of sophistry, and accordingly asked him, "What did he to thee? How opened he thine eyes?" They had before asked those questions, but now proposed them a second time, in order that the man, by repeating his account of the servile work performed at the cure, might become sensible that Jesus had thereby violated the Sabbath, and consequently must be an impostor. Thus the enemies of our dear Redeemer would gladly have prevailed on the person who had received the invaluable gift of sight, to join with them in the judgment they passed on the great person who had wrought so stupendous a miracle. But their obstinacy in denying the truth appeared so criminal to him, that he boldly answered, "I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

would ye hear it again? will ye also be his disciples?"—*John ix. 27.*

The council were highly exasperated at this retort. "They reviled him, and said, Thou art his disciple: but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is."—*John ix. 28, 29.*

The poor man, incensed at their unbelief and hardness of heart, replied, It is very strange that you should not acknowledge the divine mission of a teacher who performs such astonishing miracles; for common sense sufficiently declares, that God never assists impostors in working miracles; and accordingly there cannot be found a single example, since the creation of the world, of any such person's opening the eyes of one born blind. My opinion therefore is, that if this man had not been sent by God, he could not work any miracle at all. "The man answered and said unto them, Why, herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. Now, we know that God heareth not sinners; but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind.

If this man were not of God he could do nothing."—*John ix. 30, &c.*

The honest man's arguments, though plain, were powerful, and founded upon truths they could not deny. They all owned that "God heareth not sinners:" they all knew that God heard Jesus, by the miracle he had wrought, which was a fact proved beyond any possibility of doubt, and was such as never man performed; it therefore undeniably followed, that Jesus was not a sinner, but sent from God; since otherwise he could do nothing.

The Pharisees were not ignorant that this argument was conclusive; they felt its whole force, and well knew that it could not be resisted. Accordingly, they did not attempt to answer it, but had recourse to punishment and abusive language. Thou wicked, illiterate, impudent mortal, said they, whose understanding is still as blind as thy body lately was, and who wast born under the heaviest punishment of sin, dost thou pretend to instruct, in a matter of this kind, the guides of the people, and those who have rendered themselves eminent for their knowledge in the law? "Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?"—*John ix. 34.*

After their presumptuous taunts, the evangelist adds, that "they cast

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

him out ;” that is, they passed on him the sentence of excommunication, which was the highest punishment they had power to inflict. But though he was cut off from the Jewish society, he was nevertheless thereby united to one where no unjust sentences can ever be passed, nor any member be ever separated, during a joyful eternity.

The presumption of the Pharisees should teach us to contemplate the various arts and subtle endeavours of all the adversaries and enemies of the gospel and cross of Christ ; and not be surprised to find them, though in different shapes, employed against ourselves, if we zealously embrace the truth of Christ, as well as against all who are not afraid to confess, before all men, the glory of him who hath opened their eyes. It is impossible that the world should love those who boldly declare that its works are evil. Let us not therefore be shaken when we come to experience it, but learn from this blind man, freely and openly to confess the faith, and to declare the power of that God who hath brought us from darkness into his marvellous light, and turned our feet into the way of peace.

The feast of dedication now drew near. This solemnity was not appointed by Moses, but by that heroic reformer, Judas Maccabeus,

in commemoration of his having cleansed the temple, and restored its worship, after both had been polluted by Antiochus Epiphanes.

Although this feast was merely of human institution, Jesus determined to be present at it, even though he knew that farther attempts would be made against his life. His public ministry was indeed now drawing near its period ; and therefore the blessed Jesus would not omit any opportunity of preaching to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and of doing good to the children of men. Nor did he now, as he had formerly done, travel privately to the capital, but openly declared his intention of going to Jerusalem, and set forward on his journey with great courage and resolution.

The road from Galilee to Jerusalem lay through Samaria, and the inhabitants were those who entertained the most inveterate hatred against all who worshipped in Jerusalem. Jesus being no stranger to this disposition of the Samaritans, thought proper to send messengers before him, that they might, against his arrival, find reception for him in one of the villages. The prejudiced Samaritans, finding the intention of his journey was to worship in the temple at Jerusalem, refused to receive either him or his disciples into their houses.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The messengers being thus disappointed, returned to Jesus, and gave him an account of all that had passed; at which James and John were so exceedingly incensed, that they proposed to their Master to call fire from heaven, in order to destroy such inhospitable wretches; alleging, in excuse for such violent proceedings, the example of the prophet Elijah. "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?"—*Luke ix. 54.*

Our Lord, desirous of displaying an example of humility on every occasion, sharply rebuked them for entertaining so unbecoming a resentment for this offence. "Ye know not," said he "what manner of spirit ye are of." Ye are ignorant of the sinfulness of the disposition ye have now expressed; nor do ye consider the difference of times, persons, and dispensations. The severity exercised by Elijah on the men who came from Ahab to apprehend him, was a just reproof of an idolatrous king and people; very proper for the times, and very agreeable to the characters, both of the prophet who gave it, and of the offenders to whom it was given; and, at the same time, not unsuitable to the Mosaic dispensation. But the gospel breathes a very different spirit: and the intention of the

Messiah's coming into the world was not to destroy, but to save the lives of the children of men.

Ye wise of this world, who reject saving knowledge, behold here an instance of patience, under a real and unprovoked injury, which you cannot parallel among all your boasted heroes of antiquity! An instance of patience, which expressed infinite sweetness of disposition, and should be imitated by all the human race, especially by those who call themselves the disciples of Christ.

Being denied reception by the inhospitable inhabitants of this Samaritan village, Jesus, attended by his disciples, directed his way towards another; and as they travelled, a certain man said unto him, "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." But Jesus, to whom the secret purposes of all hearts were open, knowing he only desired the riches and honours of the Messiah's kingdom, thought proper to make him sensible of his mistake: and accordingly said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."—*Luke ix. 58.* I am so far from boasting of a temporal kingdom, and the power and pomp attending it, that I have not even the accommodation provided for the beasts of the field and the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

fowls of the air. They have safe and secure retreats ; but the Son of man is destitute of a habitation.

Jesus, in the course of his wandering, met with one who had formerly been his disciple, and ordered him to disengage himself from all worldly employments, and to follow him ; but he was desirous of excusing himself for the present, under the pretence that he was bound by the ties of gratitude to continue with his aged father till death, and he had laid his remains in the sepulchre of his ancestors : “ Lord,” said he, “ suffer me first to go and bury my father.” To which Jesus answered, “ Let the dead bury their dead ; but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.”—*Luke ix. 60.*

Let those who are immersed in worldly affairs, follow the affairs of the world ; but those who have embraced the doctrines of the Gospel, do everything in their power to spread the glad tidings of salvation in every part of the earth.

A third person offered to follow him, provided he would give him the liberty to return to his house, and take leave of his family : but Jesus told him, that he should not suffer any domestic affairs to interfere with the care of his salvation ; that the calls of religion were too pressing to admit of the least delay or excuse whatever ; and that all

who set themselves to seek the welfare of their souls, should pursue the work assiduously, without looking carelessly around them, as if they were regardless of the work they had undertaken to perform. “ No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”—*Luke ix. 62.*

As our blessed Saviour’s ministry was from this time till its final period to be confined to Judea, and the countries beyond Jordan, it was necessary that some harbingers should be sent into every town and village he was to visit, to prepare his way. Accordingly, he called his seventy disciples unto him, and after instructing them in the duties of their mission, and the particulars they were to observe in their journey, he sent them into different parts of the country, to those particular places whither he himself intended to follow them, and preach the doctrines of the Gospel to the inhabitants.

Our Lord, according to his own declaration, despatches these disciples on the same important message as he had done the twelve before.

The harvest was plenteous in Judea and Perea, as well as in Galilee, and the labourers also few ; and being never more to preach in Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Caper-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

naum, the cities wherein he had usually resided, he reflected on the reception he himself had met with from the inhabitants of those cities. He foresaw the terrible consequences that would flow from their rejecting his doctrine and the many kind offers he had made them. He was grieved for their obstinacy; and, in the overflowing tenderness of his soul, he lamented the hardness of their hearts. "Woe," said he, "unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, at the judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell."—*Luke* x. 13, 14, 15. To which our Saviour added, as some consolation to his disciples, "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me."—*Luke* x. 16.

Such a token of heavenly regard could not fail of comforting the seventy, and alleviating their minds when thinking of the ill-usage they expected to meet with during the course of their mission. They well knew that the preaching of Christ

himself had been often despised, and often unsuccessful, with respect to many of his hearers; and, therefore, they had no very great reason to expect that they should find a more welcome reception than their Master.

The seventy disciples having received their instructions and the power of working miracles from the Messiah, departed to execute their important commission in the cities and villages of Judea and Perea. And after visiting the several places, publishing the glad tidings of salvation, and working many miracles in confirmation of their mission, they returned to their Master with great joy, saying, "Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name!"

From this appeal it seems that they knew not the extent of their delegated power; and were pleasantly surprised to find the apostate spirits tremble at their command. To which their great Master replied, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." You will be no longer astonished that the devils are subject to the power I have given you, when I tell you that their prince is not able to stand before me; and, accordingly, when I first put on the vail of human nature, to destroy him and his works, I saw him, with the swiftness of the lightning's flash, fall from heaven.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Adding, in order to increase their joy, and prove that he had really cast Satan down from the seats of heaven, that he would enlarge their power. "Behold," says he, "I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you."—

Luke x. 19.

Lest they should exult beyond measure in the honour thus conferred on them, which was merely temporary, our Lord adds, "Notwithstanding, in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven."

—*Luke x. 20.*

Nor could the blessed Jesus reflect on the unsearchable wisdom and goodness of the divine dispensations to mankind, without feeling extraordinary joy; so that his beneficent heart overflowed with strains of gratitude: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight."—*Luke x. 21.*

When the disciples had executed their commission, Jesus left Samaria and retired into Judea, and in the way was met by a certain lawyer or scribe, who being desirous

of knowing whether the doctrines preached by Jesus were the same with those before delivered by Moses, asked him, What he should do to inherit eternal life? It is really amazing that any mortal should ask a question like this with a view to tempt, not to be instructed. This was, however, the case; but the blessed Jesus, though no stranger to the most secret thoughts of the heart, did not reply as he had before done to the Pharisees, "Why temptest thou me, thou hypocrite?" He turned the Scribe's weapons against himself: What, said he, is written in the law of which thou professest thyself a teacher? "How readest thou?" That law will teach thee what thou must do to be saved; and happy will it be for thee if thou compliest with its precepts. The Scribe answered, It is there written, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself."—*Luke x. 27.*

Our Lord then shows the strength and spirituality of the law: "Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live." Perform these commands, and thou hast fulfilled the duties of an Israelite: for on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Where is the man who can fulfil the law? The lawyer, who in all probability expected no such answer, being conscious of his defects, and consequently of the impossibility of obtaining eternal life on those conditions, was willing, as the sacred historian informs us, "to justify himself;" was willing to stifle the rising suggestions of his own conscience, and at the same time to make a show of his own devotion; and in order to this, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" A question very natural to be asked by a bigoted Jew, whose narrow notions led him to despise all who were not of his own fold; all who were not the natural descendants of his father Abraham.

To remove their obstinate attachment to their own principles, open their hearts to a more generous and noble way of thinking, and show them the only foundation of true love, and the extensive relation they and all mankind stand in to each other, our Saviour delivered the following most beautiful and instructive parable.

A certain person, in his journey from Jerusalem to Jericho, had the misfortune to fall into the hands of robbers, who, not content with taking his money, stripped him of his raiment, beat him in a deplorable manner, and left him for dead.

While he continued in this miserable condition, utterly incapable of assisting himself, a certain priest happened to travel the same road; "and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side." So little compassion had these ministers of religion for a brother in the most deplorable circumstances of distress, that they continued their journey, without offering to assist so miserable an object, notwithstanding their sacred characters obliged them to perform, on every occasion, the tender offices of charity and compassion. It was a brother, a descendant of Abraham, in distress; and therefore these hypocrites could offer no reasons to palliate their inhumanity. Their stony hearts could behold the affecting object of an unfortunate Israelite lying in the road naked and cruelly wounded, without being the least affected with his distress.

Though these teachers of religion were hypocrites, and wholly destitute of grace and charity, compassion glowed in the heart of a Samaritan, who, coming to the spot where this helpless object lay, ran to him; and though he found him to be a person of a different nation, and one who professed a religion oppo-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

site to his own, yet the hatred which had been instilled into his mind from his earliest years, and every objection arising from the animosity subsisting between the Jews and Samaritans, were immediately silenced by the tender sensations of pity awakened by the sight of such complicated distress; his bowels yearned towards the miserable object; though a Jew, he flew to him, and assisted him in the most tender manner.

It was the custom in these Eastern countries for travellers to carry their provisions with them; so that this compassionate Samaritan was enabled, though in the desert, to give the wounded man a little wine to recruit his spirits. He also bound up his wounds, pouring into them wine and oil, placed him on his own beast, and walked himself on foot to support him. In this manner he conducted him to an inn, took care of him during the night; and in the morning, when business called him to pursue his journey, recommended him to the care of the host, left what money he could spare, and desired that nothing might be denied him; for whatever was expended he would repay at his return.

Having finished the parable, Jesus turned himself to the lawyer, and asked him, "Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour

to him that fell among the thieves?"

The lawyer, struck with the truth and evidence of the case, replied, without the least hesitation, "He that showed mercy unto him." Upon which Jesus replied, "Go, and do thou likewise." Perform all the good offices in thy power, extend thy kindness to every one who stands in need of thy assistance, whether he be an Israelite, a Heathen, or a Samaritan. Consider every man as thy neighbour in respect to works of charity, and make no inquiry with regard to his country or religion; but only with regard to his circumstances.

On examination of the particulars of this beautiful parable, we shall find that it is composed in the finest manner to work the conviction designed; so that the lawyer, however desirous of considering those of the Jewish religion only as his neighbours, it was impossible for him to do it on this occasion. The Jews had long considered the favours of a Samaritan as a more detestable abomination than the eating swine's flesh; yet notwithstanding this prepossession, the lawyer was obliged to acknowledge that neither the priest nor the Levite, but the travelling Samaritan, by discharging the great office of humanity to the Jew in distress, was truly his neighbour; that the like humanity was

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

due from an Israelite to a Samaritan in the like distressing circumstances; and, consequently, that men are neighbours, without any regard to country, kindred, language, or religion.

Mankind are intimately connected by their common wants and their common weaknesses. Providence has formed them in such a manner, that they cannot subsist without the assistance of each other; and consequently the relation subsisting between them is as extensive as their natures, and their obligation to assist each other by mutual good offices as strong as the necessities of every individual. Our blessed Saviour hath, therefore, by this admirable parable, shown that the heart is the seat of genuine grace, and that good principles will ever produce good actions.

CHAPTER XX.

The humble Jesus resides with Martha and Mary, two obscure Women of Bethany—Improves a Circumstance which occurred at the Feast of Dedication—Prescribes a Mode of Prayer to his Disciples and future Followers—Revisits some of the Pharisaical Tribe.

THE feast of the dedication approaching, Jesus turned his course towards Jerusalem, and in the evening came to the house of Martha and Mary, the sisters of

Lazarus, at Bethany. Martha was desirous of expressing her regard for the divine guest, by providing for him and his disciples the best entertainment in her power. But her sister, who was more of a contemplative disposition, sat quietly at the feet of Jesus, listening with the utmost attention to his doctrine. For the great Redeemer of mankind never omitted any opportunity of declaring the gracious offers of the Almighty, and his unspeakable love for the children of men. Martha, being greatly fatigued with the burden of the service, complained to Jesus of the little care Mary took to assist her. “Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me.”—*Luke x. 40.*

But Martha’s officiousness incurred our Lord’s reproof, who commended Mary for her attentive application to his doctrine. “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful. And Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”—*Luke x. 41, 42.*

When Jesus repaired to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of dedication, he was informed that the beggar he had restored to sight had been, by the council, cast out of the synagogue. This information



Martha and Mary.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

excited the pity of the Son of God ; and he resolved to make him full amends for the injury he had suffered. It was long before he met the suffering person, and said to him, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered, and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him."—*John ix. 35.*

We have hinted that the beggar was thoroughly convinced the person who opened his eyes was a messenger from heaven: it is, therefore, no wonder that as soon as he knew Jesus was the person who had performed so great a work, he readily believed him to be the Son of God.

Our Saviour having thus given the poor man ample proof of his Messiahship, directed his discourse to the people, and said unto them, "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind."—*John ix. 39.* The meaning of our Saviour, though he alluded to the blind man, was spiritual. He did not intend to represent the design of his coming, but the effect it would have on the minds of men; as it would demonstrate what character and disposition every person possessed.

The humble, the docile, and the honest, though they were immersed in the night of darkness, with regard to religion and the knowledge of the Scriptures, should been lightened by his coming, as the blind man had enjoyed the invaluable gift of sight from his hands; but those who were wise, learned, and enlightened, in their own opinion, should appear in their true character, absolutely ignorant, foolish, and blind.

The Pharisees who happened to be present when he spake these words to the people, imagined that he intended to throw a reflection on their sect, which the common people, from their skill in the law, held in great veneration. Accordingly they asked him, with disdain, "Are we blind also?" Dost thou place us, who are teachers, and have taken such pains to acquire the knowledge of the Scriptures, on a level with the vulgar? To which Jesus answered, "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin; but now ye say, We see, therefore your sin remaineth." If ye had not enjoyed the faculties and opportunities of discerning the proofs of my mission, you might have been considered as blind; but as ye are superior to the vulgar in point of learning, and at the same time your hearts averse from acknowledging the truth, your en-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

lightened understanding will only aggravate your guilt.

Having condemned the obstinacy and prejudice of the sect, in rejecting the most evident tokens of the divinity of his mission, he continued the reproof, by describing the characters of a true and false teacher. It was our Lord's custom always to allude to objects before him; and being now in the outer court of the temple, near the sheep which were there exposed to sale, for sacrifice, he compared the teachers among the Jews to shepherds, and the people to sheep; a metaphor often used by the old prophets. He considered two kinds of bad shepherds, or teachers: the one, who, instead of entering in by the door to lead the flocks to the richest pastures, entered some other way, with an intention only to kill, to steal, and to destroy; the other, who, though they entered by the door to feed their flocks, with the dispositions of hirelings, yet when the wolf appeared, they deserted the sheep, having no love for any but themselves. By the former he plainly alluded to the Pharisees, who had cast the man born blind out of the synagogue, for no other reason than because he would not act contrary to the dictates of his conscience, and agree with them in declaring Jesus to be an impostor. But

though they had cast him out of their church, Christ received him into his, which is the true church, the spiritual enclosure, where the sheep go in and out, and find pasture.

To illustrate the allusion, it should be observed, that the sheep which were brought to be folded, were enclosed in little folds, within the outer court of the temple; so that the shepherd himself could not enter, till the porter had opened the door. And from this circumstance the following parabolical discourse may be easily understood. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber."—*John* x. 1. Believe me, that whosoever, in any age of the church, assumed the office of a teacher, without a commission from me, was a thief and a robber: and in the present age he is no better who assumes that office without my commission, and particularly without believing on me. "But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out; and when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him;

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

for they know his voice.”—*John* x. 2, 3, 4.

The doctrine here inculcated is, that good men are obedient to the instructions of true and faithful teachers, who, in every case, show them their duty with the greatest plainness, not concealing it because it may be disagreeable to their inclinations. On the contrary, “A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers.”—*John* x. 5. The people of God will not hearken to impostors and false teachers, who neither preach nor live the truth, but flee from them, like sheep from the voice of a stranger; for they can easily distinguish them from the messengers of God, by their fruits, their doctrines, and their lives.

Thus did the great Redeemer of mankind, by this instructive parabolical discourse, explain to the Pharisees the difference between true and false teachers; but they being ignorant of his meaning, he added, by way of explication, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep:” I am not only the door by which the shepherd must enter, but I am also the door of the sheep: it is by me that men enter into the spiritual enclosure of the true church. “All that ever came before me”—all

those who have presumed to assume the characters of teachers of religion, without commission from me, —“are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.”—*John* x. 8.

“I am the door” through which alone any one can come acceptedly unto God: “By me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.” If any man believeth on me, he shall become a true member of the church of God upon earth, and shall from time to time receive such instruction as shall nourish his soul unto eternal life. Our blessed Saviour seems to change the image in the last particular, and instead of the outer court of the temple, where the sheep were kept, represented an enclosure, where cattle were fed.

“The thief cometh not but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy; I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”—*John* x. 10. You may easily know that I am neither a thief nor a robber, by considering that the intention of such is only to steal, to kill, and to destroy the flock. They assume the characters of teachers who have received their commission from heaven, for no other reason than to promote their own interest, at the expense of the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

souls of men; but I am come merely to give you life, and even much more abundantly than it was given under the dispensation of the law.

Nor am I a hireling shepherd, appointed by the owner to take care of the flock: I am the good shepherd promised by the prophets; the true proprietor of the sheep. This is sufficiently evident from my laying down my life for the safety of the flock: whereas a hireling, who purposes nothing but his own advantage, when he sees the wolf approaching, deserts the sheep; his whole care is for his own safety, and therefore he will not expose himself to any danger on their account; so that the wolf, without resistance, tears some to pieces, and disperses the rest. "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is a hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth; and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth because he is a hireling, and careth not for the sheep."—*John* x. 11, 13.

And as I am the good shepherd, and so earnest in tending them, so I know every particular sheep, am able to claim it, in whose possession soever it be, and know everything

relating to the sheep. I know the circumstances wherein they are placed, am well acquainted with their wants, and can judge what assistance they need. Besides, I love them all with the greatest sincerity, and approve of their faith in, and obedience to me, because it is sincere, and springs from a right principle. For they have just notions of my dignity and character; they know that I am their Shepherd and Saviour, sent from God; and that I am able to feed them with knowledge, deliver them from sin, and the punishment of it, and bestow on them eternal life, and procure them a place in the blissful mansions of my Father's house. "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine."—*John* x. 14.

And this mutual knowledge and love of each other is like that subsisting between me and my Father: "As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep."—*John* x. 15. I will give a convincing proof of the love I bear the sheep; I will lay down my life for them: an instance of regard that will never be given by a hireling.

But I have other sheep besides those of the seed of Abraham; numbers of my flock are among the Gentiles. These also I must bring

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

into my church, and they will cheerfully submit to my laws. There shall be then but one fold, and they shall know me, shall distinguish my voice from that of a stranger, and though consisting of Jews and Gentiles, yet they shall have but one shepherd to feed and govern them; for the middle wall of partition shall be broken down. "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd."—*John* x. 16.

And because I lay down my life to save the world, therefore my heavenly father loveth me. But though I lay down my life, I will take it again; for I will in due time rise from the dead. I do not, however, either lay down my life or rise from the dead without the appointment of the Almighty. I act in both according to the divine wisdom, and agreeably to the will of my heavenly Father. "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself: I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father."—*John* x. 17, 18.

Various were the effects produced by this discourse upon the

minds of the Jews. Some of them cried out that he was mad, and possessed with a devil, and that it was the highest folly to hear him; while others, who judged more impartially of him and his doctrine, declared that his discourses were not those of a lunatic, nor his miracles the works of a devil: asking those who were enemies to Jesus, if they imagined any devil was able to confer the faculty of sight on one that was born blind?

There was a division, therefore, again among the Jews for these sayings; and many of them said, "He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?"—*John* x. 19, 20, 21.

Soon after, as Jesus was standing in Solomon's porch, the Jews came to him, desiring that he would tell them plainly whether he was the expected Messiah, or not. But Jesus, knowing that they did not ask this question for information, but to gain an opportunity of accusing him to the Romans, as a seditious person, who endeavoured to deceive the people, by pretending to be the great Son of David, promised by the prophets, in order to usurp the kingdom, told them that they must form a judgment of him from his actions: "I told you,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you."—*John* x. 25, 26. Your unbelief is the effect of your attachment to this world, being unwilling to receive the doctrine of the kingdom of heaven; because you must then renounce all your fond hopes of temporal power and advantage. But, on the contrary, those who are of a meek and humble disposition, and their minds free from worldly passions, easily perceive the truth of my doctrine and miracles, and consequently are readily disposed to become my disciples. Nor shall such persons lose their reward; for I will willingly receive them, and make them partakers of eternal life in my Father's kingdom. And however assiduous malicious men may be in endeavouring to hinder men from believing on me, they shall never be able to effect their purpose, though assisted by all the powers of darkness. For my heavenly Father, who hath given them to me, is far greater than them all: nor is any able to contend with him. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my

hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."—*John* x. 27, &c.

The Jews were so incensed at this declaration, which they considered as blasphemous, that they took up stones to cast at him, in conformity to the law, which commands all blasphemers to be stoned. But Jesus asked them, which of the beneficent miracles he had wrought in confirmation of his mission deserved such treatment? "Many good works have I showed you from my Father: for which of those works do ye stone me?"—*John* x. 32. As if he had said, I have fed the hungry in the desert, I have healed the lame, I have cleansed the lepers, I have cured the sick, I have given sight to the blind, I have cast out devils, and I have raised the dead: for which of these works are ye going to stone me? Do these miracles indicate that the author of them is an impostor? Or can you be so stupid as to think that the Almighty would suffer any person to perform such works, with no other intention than to deceive the human race? The Jews answered, We are far from thinking that thou deservest punishment for any good work thou hast done in favour of the afflicted and distressed: the punishment is intended to chas-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

tise thee for thy blasphemous speeches; for thou, though a weak mortal, a being of a day like ourselves, arrogantly assumest the power and majesty of the Most High, and, by claiming the incommunicable attributes of the Deity, makest thyself God. "For a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God."—*John* x. 33.

Jesus replied, have not the Scriptures expressly called those "Gods" and the "Sons of God" who were commissioned to govern God's people, on account of their high office, and the inspiration of the Spirit which was, though sparingly, bestowed upon them? Can you, therefore, impute to that person whom the Almighty hath sanctified, and sent into the world to save lost mankind, and pay the price of redemption for all the sons of men; can you, I say, impute blasphemy unto him, for taking on himself the title of the Son of God? If my own assertion be not sufficient to convince you of my personal dignity, you must surely think that the many miracles I have wrought abundantly prove that they are the works of the Most High, as Omnipotence alone could perform them; and, therefore, that the Father and I are so united, that

whatever I say or do is approved of by the Almighty. "Is it not written in your law, I said, ye are Gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the Scripture cannot be broken, say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest, because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him."—*John* x. 34, &c.

But this reply, instead of satisfying the Jews, rather tended to enrage them the more: and Jesus, seeing it was of no consequence to reason with so headstrong a people, withdrew himself in an extraordinary manner, and so escaped from them. "Therefore they sought again to take him; but he escaped out of their hand."—*John* x. 39.

What prudence, mingled with spirit and sweetness, runs through the answers of Christ to the Jews! What inestimable blessings does he propose, to invite them into his fold! May we never forget those gracious words! May we ever be entitled to all the comfort of them! "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

my hand." Lord, may we be found in the number of those secure and happy souls, even of those who know thee, and who obey thy voice, and follow thee whithersoever thou leadest them by thine example, thy providence, thy word, and Spirit!

The feast of the dedication being now over, Jesus departed from Jerusalem, and retired into the parts of Perea beyond Jordan. Here his ministry was attended with great success; for the inhabitants of the country, remembering what had been told them by John the Baptist, concerning Jesus, and being sensible that the doctrine and miracles of our blessed Saviour were fully equal to what the Baptist had foretold, firmly believed him to be the Messiah.

According to this supposition, which seems the most agreeable to reason, the inhabitants of these countries enjoyed the doctrines and miracles of the Son of God for a very considerable time. But however this be, the evangelist tells us, that while he was executing his ministry beyond Jordan, he happened to pray publicly, with such fervency, that one of his disciples, who was exceedingly affected, both with the matter and manner of his address, begged he would teach them to pray. "And it came to pass, that as he was praying in a

certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven; hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins: for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil."—*Luke xi. 1, 4.*

Soon after, our blessed Saviour cast out a devil; when some, who were present, ascribed the miracle to Beelzebub. "And he was casting out a devil, and it was dumb; and it came to pass when the devil was gone out the dumb spake; and the people wondered." But some of them said, "He casteth out devils through Beelzebub, the chief of the devils."—*Luke ix, 14, 15.* However strange this argument may seem, and however weak and absurd it must appear to impartial judges, yet it had a considerable effect on illiterate persons, especially on those whose prejudices and interests it favoured. The Pharisees pretended, that as Jesus had all along been at great pains to oppose the traditions which most of the teachers of that age considered as the essen-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

tials of religion, and the principal branches of piety, they concluded that he must be a very wicked person.

They also supposed that a false prophet had the power of working signs and wonders; and thence concluded, that our Saviour performed all his miracles by the assistance of evil spirits, with an intention to turn the people from the worship of the true God.

Another pretended reason for ascribing his miracles to evil spirits, was, that the demons themselves, when they departed out of the persons possessed, honoured him with the title of the Messiah. Their arguments, though so evidently founded on falsehood, contributed largely to the infidelity of the Jews: and however we may be surprised that such weak reasons should have any effect, considering what multitudes were witnesses of the many miracles the blessed Jesus performed on the sick of all sorts, on the blind, the deaf, the dumb, the maimed, the lame, on paralytics, lunatics, demons, and the other miserable objects; nay, on the dead, whom he raised again to life; on the winds and the seas; in a word, on every part of nature; yet experience hath abundantly convinced us, that, notwithstanding all these evidences, their own superstitious opinion fixed

that headstrong people in their infidelity.

Though part of the multitude were content with ascribing this miracle to the power of evil spirits, others went still farther, desiring him to prove himself the Messiah, by giving them a sign from heaven. But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, refused to grant them this request; telling them, that they were a wicked race of mortals, and discovered a very perverse disposition, by seeking, after so many miracles had been performed, a sign from heaven; and, therefore, that no greater sign should be given them than the sign of the prophet Jonas. "This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet."—*Luke xi. 29.*

"No man," added the Saviour of the world, "when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it into a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light." No man endued with the Spirit of God, concealeth the blessed gift; but holdeth forth the glorious doctrines of salvation as it were like a candle, that the light of the same may shine upon the souls of men who hear them. "The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

of light : but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed, therefore, that the light which is in thee be not darkness."

—*Luke xi. 34, &c.* Take care, therefore, that thy soul be so completely enlightened by the Spirit, that the emanation of its light be not in the least interrupted by an evil passion or affection ; that all the faculties of the soul may be as much enlightened and assisted, as the members of the body are by the bright shining of a candle. "If thy whole body, therefore, be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light."—*Luke xi. 36.*

Thus did our blessed Saviour prove the truth of his mission, against the cavils and sophistical reasoning of his malicious enemies. And when he had done speaking, one of the Pharisees present desired he would dine with him. The Redeemer of mankind accepting the invitation, though probably given, as some think, with an insidious design, accompanied the Pharisee to his house, and sat down to meat, but without performing the ceremony of washing, observed by all the other guests.

An omission of this kind could not fail of surprising the Pharisee, as he had thereby shown an open

contempt of their traditions. Jesus, who well knew the thoughts of this bigoted Pharisee, said to him, Your sect are remarkably careful to keep every thing clean that touches your food, lest by eating it your body should be polluted ; but you take no pains to cleanse your minds from the pollution of rapine, covetousness, and wickedness. You must surely be convinced, that he who created the body, formed also the soul ; and can you imagine, that the Almighty, who requires purity of body, because it is the work of his hands, will not also insist upon a greater purity of soul, which is undoubtedly the far nobler part of human nature ? Instead, therefore, of that scrupulous solicitude of washing your hands, when you sit down to meat, ye should be careful to apply yourselves to the great duty of benevolence ; a duty that will render it impossible for any external things to defile you, but will be at all times acceptable to your Maker. "Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter ; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. Ye fools, did not he that made that which is without, make that which is within also ? But rather give alms of such things as ye have ; and, behold, all things are clean unto you."—*Luke xi. 39, &c.*

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

But the Pharisees, obstinate and perverse, withstood every means made use of by the benign Redeemer of mankind to conquer their prejudices, and bring them to the knowledge of the truth; and therefore our blessed Saviour treated them on this occasion with a kind and wholesome severity, denouncing against them the most dreadful woes, for regarding so zealously the ceremonial parts of religion, and at the same time utterly neglecting the very precepts of their own religion. "Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue, and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets. Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them."—*Luke xi. 42, 44.*

A certain lawyer, who sat at the table, thinking that this rebuke, though levelled principally against the Scribes and Pharisees, affected his order also, was greatly displeased. But our blessed Saviour, who had never any regard to the persons of men, despised his resentment, and told him freely what he

thought of their character. "Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers."—*Luke xi. 46.* You pervert in a very erroneous manner the interpretation of Scripture, for no other reason than to favour the tradition of the elders, and by that means lay so heavy a burden on the shoulders of the descendants of Jacob, that neither you nor they will touch with one of their fingers.

The blessed Jesus also condemned them for building the sepulchres of the prophets, whom their fathers had murdered; because they did not do it from the respect which they had for the memory of these holy men, but from a secret approbation of their fathers' actions; as too evidently appeared from their whole conduct. "Woe unto you! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres. Therefore also said the Wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute: that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world might be required of this gene-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

ration; from the blood of Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple; verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation.”—*Luke xi. 47, &c.*

Our Lord also reprov'd the lawyers for filling the minds of the people with notions founded on wrong interpretations of Scripture, whereby they were prejudiced against the Gospel; not being contented with rejecting it themselves, but took care to hinder others from receiving it. “Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.”—*Luke xi. 52.*

Such honest reprimands highly provok'd the Pharisee and his guests. They were conscious of being guilty of the crimes laid to their charge, but unwilling the people should think them guilty; and, therefore, out of revenge, urg'd him to speak on a variety of topics, hoping they should be able by these means to find occasion of rendering him obnoxious either to the government or the multitude. “And as he said these things unto them, the Scribes and the Pharisees began to urge him vehemently, and to provoke him to speak of many things; laying wait for him, and

seeking to catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him.”—*Luke xi. 53, 54.*

CHAPTER XXI.

Explanation of the Origin and Opinions of the different Sects among the Jews—Our Lord teaches the Multitude by plain Discourse, and also by Parables.

HAVING undertaken to write the history of the life of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we cannot omit a distinct account of the different sects of the Jews, a people with whom he was most intimately concerned; both as an elucidation of many circumstances, as well as a verification of many things foretold concerning the Messiah.

Josephus reckons four principal sects among the Jews; namely, the Pharisees, the Sadducees (called also Herodians), the Essenes, and the Galileans. The evangelists mention only two, the Pharisees and Sadducees.

The rise of the Pharisees is unknown. They claim, indeed, the celebrated Hillel for their founder, as he is by some supposed to have lived during the pontificate of Jonathan, about a hundred and fifty years before the birth of Christ; but others, with more reason, suppose that he was contemporary with the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

famous Someas, who lived about the time of Herod, long before whom the sect of the Pharisees was in high repute. It is therefore probable that they claim Hillel rather as an ornament than as the author of the sect.

One of the most famous tenets of the Pharisees, was that of an oral tradition handed down from Moses, and to which they attributed the same divine authority as to the sacred books. This being strenuously opposed by the Sadducees and Samaritans, rendered these equally detested by them. But none more incurred their hatred than the blessed Jesus, who embraced every occasion of reproving them for the unjustifiable preference they gave this pretended tradition to the written word of God, and for condemning those as apostates worthy of death who did not pay the same, or even a greater regard, to the former than to the latter.

Another tenet they embraced, in opposition to the Sadducees, was that of the existence of angels, the immortality of the soul, and the resurrection of the dead, and future rewards. But with regard to the last they excluded all who were notoriously wicked from having any share in the happiness of eternity; supposing that as soon as death had put a period to their lives, their

souls were conveyed into everlasting punishment.

A third tenet was, that all things were subject to fate; or, as some expressed it, to the heavens. It is not easy to conceive what they meant by this; Josephus, indeed, will have it that they designed to reconcile the fatality or predestination of the Essenes with the free-will of the Sadducees.

If so, this is not the only absurdity, or even contradiction, which they held: but a certain learned prelate seems to have proved that they attributed all to fate, or to that chain of causes to which the Creator had subjected all things from the beginning; among which the influence of the heavenly bodies was considered the principal. This seems to be hinted at by St. James, in the beginning of his epistle to the new converts, where he explodes that Pharisaical leaven, by the most beautiful opposition of the immutability of God, the giver of all good, to the mutability of the planets, which, according to that notion, must necessarily vary their aspects from a malign to a benevolent one, and the contrary, even by their natural motions and change of position. This tenet of the Pharisees was, therefore, a source of dislike to the doctrines delivered by the blessed Jesus; as these affirm that

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

men are the authors of their own unbelief, disobedience, and obstinacy; and, consequently, answerable for that, and all the train of evils these vices draw after them.

But the most distinguishing character of the Pharisees, and that which rendered them more obnoxious to the just censures of our blessed Saviour, was their supererogatory attachment to the ceremonial law, their frequent washings, fastings, and prayings, their giving alms publicly, seeking for proselytes, scrupulous tithings, affected gravity of dress, gesture, and mortified looks; their building the tombs of the prophets, to tell the world that they were more righteous than their ancestors who murdered them, though they were themselves plotting the death of one greater than all the prophets; their over scrupulous observance of the Sabbath, to the exclusion of the works of the greatest charity; and many others of the like nature; while they were wholly negligent of the moral and eternal law of mercy and justice, of charity and humility, and the like indispensable virtues. The very best of them contented themselves with abstaining from the actual committing any enormous act, while they indulged themselves in the most wicked thoughts and desires. Nay, some, more hardened in their vices, made

no scruple not only of coveting, but destroying poor widows' houses: of committing the vilest oppressions, injustice, and cruelties, and of encouraging these enormities in their followers, under the specious cloak of religion and sanctity. Well, therefore, might the great Redeemer of mankind compare them to whited sepulchres, beautiful indeed without, but within full of rottenness and corruption.

The last erroneous opinion we shall mention of the Pharisees, common indeed to all the other sects, but more exactly conformable to their haughty, rapacious, and cruel temper, was their expectation of a powerful, a conquering Messiah, who was to bring the whole world under the Jewish yoke; so that there was scarce an inhabitant of Jerusalem, however mean, that did not expect to be made a governor of some opulent province under that wonderful prince. How unlikely was it, then, that the preaching of the meek, the humble Jesus, whose doctrine breathed nothing but humility, peace, sincerity, contempt of the world, and universal love and beneficence, should ever be relished by that proud, that covetous, that hypocritical sect, or even by the rest of the people, while these, their teachers so strenuously opposed it?

The sect of the Sadducees is said

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

to have been founded by one Saddoc, a disciple of Antigonus of Socho. Their chief tenet was, that our serving God ought to be free either from slavish fear of punishment or from selfish hope of reward; that it should be disinterested, and flow only from the pure love and fear of the Supreme Being. They added, that God was the only immaterial being; in consequence of which they denied the existence of angels, or any spiritual substances, except the Almighty himself. It is therefore no wonder that the Sadducees should take every opportunity of opposing and ridiculing the doctrine of the resurrection.

Another of their tenets, equally opposite to the Pharisees and to the doctrine of Christ, was, that man was constituted absolute master of all his actions, and stood in no need of any assistance to choose or act: for this reason, they were always very severe in their sentences when they sat as judges. They rejected all the pretended oral traditions of the Pharisees, admitting only the texts of the sacred books, and preferred those of Moses to all the rest of the inspired writings.

They are charged with some other erroneous tenets by Josephus and the Talmudists; but those already mentioned are abundantly sufficient for the purpose. The notions of

a future life, universal judgment, eternal rewards and punishments, to men whom a contrary doctrine had long soothed into luxury and an overgrown fondness for temporal happiness, which they considered as the only reward for their obedience, must of necessity appear strange and frightful; and, as such, could not fail of meeting with the strongest opposition from them; especially if we add, what Josephus observes, that they were in general men of the greatest quality and opulence, and consequently too apt to prefer the pleasures and grandeur of this life to those of another.

The sect of Galileans (or Gaulonites), so called from Judas the Galilean or Gaulonite, appeared soon after the banishment of Archelaus, when his territories were made a Roman province, and the government given to Coponius. For the Jews considering this as an open attempt to reduce them to slavery, Judas took advantage of their discontent; and, to ripen them for an insurrection, Augustus furnished them with a plausible pretence, by issuing about this time an edict for surveying the whole province of Syria, and laying on it a proportional tax. Judas, therefore, who was a man of uncommon ambition, took occasion from this incident to display all his eloquence, in order to

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

convince the Jews that such a submission was nothing less than base idolatry, and placing men on a level with the God of Jacob, who was the only Lord and Sovereign that could challenge their obedience and subjection. The party which he drew after him became in a short time so considerable, that they threw every thing into confusion, laid the foundation for those frightful consequences that ensued, and which did not end but with the destruction of Jerusalem.

The Essenes, though not mentioned by the evangelists, made a very considerable sect among the Jews, and are highly celebrated by Josephus, Philo, Pliny, and several Christian writers, both ancient and modern. It is impossible to trace their origin, or even the etymology of their name. This, however, is certain, that they were settled in Judea in the time of Jonathan, the brother and successor of Judas Maccabeus, about a hundred and fifty years before Christ.

The Essenes distinguished themselves, by their rules and manner of life, into laborious and contemplative. The former divided their time between prayer and labour; such as the exercise of some handicraft, or the cultivation of some particular spot of ground, where they planted and sowed such roots, corn, &c., as

served for their food; and the latter, between prayer, contemplation, and study. In this last, they confined themselves to the sacred books and morality, without troubling themselves with any branch of philosophy.

But the contemplative and laborious had their synagogues, their stated hours for prayer, for reading, and expounding the sacred books. The latter was always performed by the elders, who were seated at the upper end of the synagogue, according to their seniority; while the younger, who were permitted to read the lessons, were placed at the lower. Their expositions were generally of the allegorical kind, in which they seemed to have excelled all their Jewish brethren. But they paid the greatest regard to the five books of Moses, and considered that lawgiver as the head of all the inspired penmen; they even condemned to immediate death whoever spoke disrespectfully either of him or his writings. Upon this account, they studied, read, and expounded him more than all the rest, and seem to have drawn all their religion chiefly from the Pentateuch. The doctrines and expositions of the elders were received with implicit faith, and in their practice they conformed with an entire submission to all their sect.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

With respect to their faith, they believed the existence of angels, the immortality of the soul, and a future state of rewards and punishments, like the Pharisees; but seem to have had no notion of the resurrection. They considered the souls of men as composed of a most subtile ether, which immediately after their separation from the body, or from the cage or prison, as they called it, were adjudged to a place of endless happiness or misery: that the good took their flight over the ocean, into some warm and delightful regions prepared for them; while the wicked were conveyed to some cold and intemperate climates, where they were left to groan under an inexpressible weight of misery. They were likewise entirely averse to the Sadducean doctrine of free-will, attributing all to an eternal fatality, or chain of causes. They were averse to all kinds of oaths; affirming that a man's life ought to be such that he may be credited without them. The contemplative sort placed the excellency of their meditative life in raising their minds above the earth, and placing their thoughts on heaven: when they had attained this degree of excellency, they acquired the character of prophets.

In their practice they excelled all the other sects in austerity. If we

may credit Philo, it was a fundamental maxim with them, upon their entrance into the contemplative life, to renounce the world, and to divide among their friends and relations their properties and estates. They never ate till after sun-set, and the best of their food was coarse bread, a little salt, and a few stomachic herbs. Their clothing was made of coarse wool, plain, but white: they condemned all sorts of unctions and perfumes, as luxurious and effeminate. Their beds were hard, and their sleep short. Their heads or superiors were generally chosen according to seniority, unless there started up among the brotherhood some more conspicuous for learning, piety, or prophetic spirit. Some of them, indeed, were so contemplative that they never stirred out of their cell, or even looked out of their window, during the whole week, spending their time in reading the sacred books, and writing comments upon them. On the Sabbath-day they repaired to their synagogues early in the morning, and continued there the whole day in prayer, singing of psalms, or expounding the sacred books.

Having endeavoured to explain the origin and tenets of the several sects among the Jews, we now return to the history of our blessed Saviour, whom we left preaching in

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

the country beyond Jordan, when he was surrounded by an innumerable multitude of people.

In the audience of this vast assembly he gave his disciples in general a charge to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, namely, hypocrisy; because all their actions would be brought to light, either in this world or in that which is to come; and therefore exhorted them to be very careful never to do any thing which could not bear the light, but to let the whole of their behaviour be honest, just, and good. “Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore, whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets, shall be proclaimed upon the house-tops.” — *Luke* xii. 1, 2, 3.

This argument against hypocrisy he improved as a reason for their acquiring another quality, which would much better serve all the ends they could propose; namely, an undaunted resolution in the performance of their duty, founded on a firm confidence in God, who would bring to light the most secret word and thought, publicly condemn the wicked, and

justify his faithful servants and children.

Fear not, said he, the malice of the human race: it can extend no farther than the destruction of the body; your soul may bid defiance to their impotent rage. But dread the displeasure of that almighty Being who, after he has destroyed the body, is able to confine the soul in eternal torments. Remember all things are in his power, and that nothing happens without his permission; he provides for the meanest of his creatures: and surely you may think yourselves under his protection, who numbers the very hairs of your head; nor can your enemies touch one of them without his permission. “And I say unto you, my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him which, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell, yea, I say unto you, fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? but even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.” — *Luke* xii. 4, &c.

Our Lord, to animate his followers to perseverance, admonishes them to look forward unto the general

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

judgment, when he would acknowledge them as his servants, provided they acknowledged him in this world as their Master, and cheerfully and constantly obeyed his commands. But if they were ashamed of him and his doctrine before the sons of men, he would disown them before the celestial host. And that those who reviled the Spirit, by whom they performed their miracles, should be punished by the Almighty in proportion to the malignity of their crime, which is greater than that of reviling the Son of God himself; because it will be impossible for them to repent. “Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God. But he that denieth me before men, shall be denied before the angels of God. And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him : but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven.”—*Luke* xii. 8, &c.

He also cautioned his disciples not to be perplexed with regard to an answer, when they should be brought before the rulers of the people, because they should be inspired by the Spirit of God. “And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates and powers, take ye no thought how or

what things ye shall answer, or what ye shall say : For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.”—*Luke* xii. 11, 12.

While our blessed Saviour was delivering these exhortations to his disciples, a certain person among the multitude begged him that he would interpose his authority with his brother, in order to oblige him to divide their paternal inheritance between them : but as this decision properly belonged to the magistrates, our blessed Saviour, who came into the world to redeem the souls of men, and to purchase for them an eternal, not a temporal, inheritance, declined the office. He, however, embraced the opportunity of giving his hearers the most solemn caution against covetousness ; declaring that neither the length nor happiness of human life had any dependence on the largeness of possessions. “Take heed, and beware of covetousness : for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.”—*Luke* xii. 15.

To excite their comparative negligence of the things of this life, he placed before them in the strongest light an example of the bewitching influence of wealth, in the parable of a rich man who was cut off in the midst of his projects, and became a remarkable example of the folly of amassing the goods of this

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

life, without having any regard to the commands of the Almighty. This wretched man, forgetting his own mortality, made preparations for a long and luxurious life, pleasing himself with the thought of possessing an inexhaustible fund of sensual enjoyments. But, alas! while he was providing repositories for his riches, the inexorable king of terrors seized him, and that very night hurried him before the awful tribunal of Omnipotence. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall these things be which thou hast provided?"—*Luke* xii. 16, &c.

How solemn the appeal! While he lay waking on his bed, in anxious solicitude what he should do with his abundance; while his heart was dilated with the hopes of a variety of pleasures and indulgences; in

that very moment the golden dream vanishes at once; all his thoughts perish, and in their stead a horrid account stares him in the face; a scene of judgment presents itself to his terrified imagination; a dark night of horror in an instant overwhelms that soul to which he had promised so much ease, so much pleasure; and instead of ease, instead of eating, drinking, and making merry, eternal tortures, unspeakable thirst, weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, must be the portion of this miserable soul to all eternity.

"So is he," added our blessed Saviour, "that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God." Thus shall he be taken away from all his soul desireth, thus shall he be torn from all his temporal prospects and pleasures. None of his beloved enjoyments shall follow him; naked as he came shall he depart out of the world, nor shall all his riches be able to procure him the least comfort or respite in these scenes of terror. How should this reflection awaken us to a due care of our immortal part; how should it alarm us, when planning fancied schemes of worldly pleasures, without the least regard to the great Disposer of all events! Without his assistance, all our promises of security are vain and foolish; he will surely render all

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

our labours abortive; and in a moment, when we think ourselves secure, the summons shall arrive, swift as the forky lightning's flash, convey us to the boundless regions of eternity, and present us, clothed in all our guilt, before the just, the mighty Author of our being!

This awakening parable exhibits a striking picture of the egregious folly of those who live only for themselves, laying up treasures for sensual enjoyments, but neglect the grace of God, and the immense treasure of salvation laid up in Jesus Christ.

And yet, alas! how many are there, who are now as deeply engaged in their worldly schemes as this "rich fool" in the parable, to whom God will, in a few weeks or days, if not "this very night," say, by the awful voice of his irresistible providence, "Thy soul is required of thee!" And then, what will all these treasures do to purchase life, or to allay the agonies of death? So far will they be found from being capable of this, that they will rather serve to increase and embitter the surprise and anguish of those agonies. Let it then be our labour and care that we may be rich towards God; rich in works of piety and charity. So shall we safely consign over our treasure to the bank of heaven, and

shall be enriched by it, when we leave the world as naked as we entered into it, and lose all but what has been so wisely and happily spent.

Having spoken this parable, our Lord proceeded to caution his disciples against anxious cares for the things of this world, from a consideration that the care of God's providence extends to every part of the creation. The fowls of heaven are fed by his bounty, and the lilies that adorn the valleys are supplied with rain from the clouds of heaven: if, therefore, said the blessed Jesus, Omnipotence so carefully provides for the inferior parts of the creation, the children of men have surely reason to rely on his bounty, and depend for subsistence on his merciful hand. He added, that as God had called them to everlasting happiness in a future life, he would surely provide for them all the necessities of the present. "Fear not, little flock; for it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." At the same time he gave his disciples another precept, peculiarly calculated for those times, in which the profession of the gospel exposed men to the loss of their substance: "Sell that ye have, and give alms: provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

not; where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”—*Luke* xii. 33, 34.

Having thus recommended to them the disengagement of their affections from the things of this world, he exhorted them to labour after improvement in grace. “Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and be yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when he shall return from the wedding, that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.”—*Luke* xii. 35, 36.

This was spoken in allusion to the customs of the East, where anciently great entertainments were made in the evening; and on these occasions servants demonstrated their diligence by watching, and keeping their loins girded and their lamps burning, that they might be ready, on the first knock of their master, to open the door. Nor was it uncommon for the master, in order to reward such a servant, to order him refreshment, and sometimes even give it him with his own hand. In allusion to which custom, our blessed Saviour added, “Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching. Verily, I say unto you, That he shall gird himself, and make them sit down to meat, and will

come forth and serve them.”—*Luke* xii. 37.

Our Saviour enforced this constant watchfulness and habitual preparation by reminding them of the uncertainty of his coming: telling his disciples, that as every master of a family, if he knew the coming of the thief, would make some preparation against a surprise, so it would be highly requisite for them to make some preparation for the approach of their Master, and be always ready to receive him, as the time of his coming was uncertain.

CHAPTER XXII.

Our Lord reproves the ignorance of the People in not understanding the Signs which preceded his appearance—Pertinently replies to an ignorant Question and Inference concerning the Galileans—Teaches by parable—Relieves a distressed Woman—Is warned to depart the country, in order to escape the resentment of Herod.

THE great Preacher of Israel having delivered these salutary admonitions to his disciples and followers, directed his discourse to the unbelieving crowd. You can, said he, by the signs that appear in the sky and on the earth form a judgment of the weather; and why can ye not also discover the time of the Messiah's appearance, by the signs which have preceded it?

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

“When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is. And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass. Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky, and of the earth, but how is it that ye do not discern this time?”—*Luke* xii. 54, &c.

The prediction of the Son of man coming to punish the Jews for their rebellion and infidelity, delivered under the similitude of one who cometh secretly and unexpectedly to plunder a house, was a loud call to a national repentance. In order, therefore, to improve that prediction, he exhorted them to a speedy reformation, telling them that the least degree of reflection would be sufficient to point out to them the best methods they could possibly make use of for averting the impending judgments of the Almighty; illustrating what he had said by the punishments commonly inflicted on the man who refuses to make reparation for the injuries he has done his neighbour. “When thou goest with thine adversary to the magistrate, as thou art in the way give diligence that thou mayest be delivered from him; lest he hale thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and the officer cast thee into prison. I tell thee, thou shalt not depart thence till thou hast

paid the very last mite.”—*Luke* xii. 58, 59.

Some of his hearers thought proper to confirm his doctrine by giving what they considered as an example of it: “There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices,” thinking that providence, for some extraordinary crime, had suffered these Galileans to be murdered at the altar.

But our Lord showed them the error of their opinion and inference concerning this point, it being no indication that these Galileans were greater sinners than their countrymen, because they had suffered so severe a calamity; and at the same time exhorted them to improve such instances of calamity, as incitements to their own repentance: assuring them, that if they neglected so salutary a work they should all likewise perish. “And Jesus answering, said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”—*Luke* xiii. 2, &c.

He illustrated this doctrine by putting them in mind of the eighteen persons on whom the tower of Siloam fell; showing them, by this instance, the folly of interpreting

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

the dispensations of Providence in that manner: for though this calamity seemed to flow immediately from the hand of God, yet, in all probability, it had involved people who were remarkable for their piety and goodness. "Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt at Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."—*Luke* xiii. 4, 5.

To rouse them from their indolence, and to induce them to seek the aid of God's grace and Spirit, he added the parable of the fig-tree, which the master of the vineyard, after finding it three years barren, ordered to be destroyed; but was spared one year longer, at the earnest solicitation of the gardener. "A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none; cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he, answering, said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."—*Luke* xiii. 6, &c.

By this parable our blessed Saviour represented the goodness of the Almighty towards the Jews, in choosing them for his people, giving them the outward dispensations of religion, and informing them of the improvements he expected they should make of these advantages, and the punishments he would inflict upon them in case they slighted such benevolent offers. He also represented by it, in a very beautiful manner, the unbounded mercies of the Almighty, in sparing them at the intercession of his Son, and giving them a farther time of trial, and still greater advantages, by the preaching of the blessed Jesus and his apostles; concluding with an intimation that, if they neglected this last opportunity, they should perish without remedy.

During Jesus' abode in the country of Perea, he observed, while he was preaching in one of the synagogues, on the Sabbath-day, a woman who during the space of eighteen years had been unable to stand upright. A daughter of Abraham labouring under so terrible a disorder, could not fail of attracting the compassion of the Son of God.

He beheld this affecting object, he pitied her deplorable condition, he removed her complaint. She who came into the synagogue bowed down with an infirmity was, by

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

the all-powerful word of the Son of God, restored to her natural health, and returned to her house upright, and full of vigour.

Such a display of divine power and goodness, instead of exciting the gratitude, so highly offended the master of the synagogue, that he openly testified his displeasure, and reproved the people as Sabbath-breakers, because they came on that day to be healed. "There are six days," said this surly ruler to the people, "in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath-day."—*Luke* xiii. 14.

But our blessed Saviour soon silenced this hypocritical Pharisee, by showing that he had not deviated from their own avowed practice. They made no scruple of loosing their cattle, and leading them to water on the Sabbath-day, because the mercy of the action sufficiently justified them in performing it. And surely his action of loosing, by a single word, a woman, a rational creature, a daughter of Abraham, who had been bound by an incurable distemper during the tedious space of eighteen years, was abundantly justified; nor could this bigoted ruler have thought otherwise, had not his reason been blinded by his superstition. "The Lord then answered him, and said,

Thou hypocrite, doth not each of you, on the Sabbath, loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath-day? And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him."—*Luke* xiii. 15, &c.

From this instance we may form some idea of the pernicious effects of superstition, which is capable of extinguishing reason, banishing compassion, and of eradicating the most essential principles and feelings of the human breast.

Our Lord, having reproved the superstition of the ruler of the synagogue, and observing the acclamations of the people, then proceeded to demonstrate the reason and truth which so effectually supported his kingdom. For he repeated the parables of the grain of mustard-seed and of the leaven, to show the efficacious operations of the gospel upon the minds of the children of men, and its rapid progress through the world, notwithstanding all the opposition of its most inveterate enemies.

The great Redeemer having now planted the seeds of the gospel in

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

the country of Perea, crossed the Jordan and travelled by slow journeys towards Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in every village, and declaring the glad tidings of salvation to all the inhabitants of those countries.

While he was thus labouring for the salvation of mankind, one of the persons who accompanied him asked him, "Lord are there few that be saved?" In all probability, the person who proposed this question had heard the Son of God describe the success of the gospel by the parables of the mustard-seed and leaven; and his notions of the kingdom of the Messiah being those that were then entertained by the Jews in general, he meant a temporal salvation. But Jesus, to convince him that he never intended to erect a secular kingdom, answered the question in a spiritual manner, and told him that a small number only of the Jews would be saved; exhorting them to embrace the offers of mercy before it was too late, for that many after the period of their trial was concluded, and their state finally and irreversibly determined, should earnestly desire these benevolent offers, but should be denied their request. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and

hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are."—*Luke* xiii. 24, 25. He also repeated on this occasion what he had before delivered in his famous sermon on the mount; and what he had observed to the multitude in commendation of the centurion's faith. "Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are: depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last."—*Luke* xiii. 26. &c.

Immediately after Jesus had thus preached the kingdom of God to the multitude, certain of the Pharisees came to him, and told him that unless he departed thence Herod would destroy him: but this concern for his safety was altogether

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

feigned, and their real design no other than to intimidate him, hoping by that means to induce him to leave the country, and retire into Judea, where they did not doubt but the chief priests would find some method of putting him to death. Perhaps Herod himself was privy to this message, and desired that Jesus should leave his territories, though the agonies he had suffered on account of John the Baptist hindered him from making use of force. That this was really the case seems evident from the answer our blessed Saviour made to the Pharisees. "Go ye," said he to these hypocritical Israelites, "and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Nevertheless, I must walk to-day, and to-morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem."—*Luke* xiii. 32, 33.

Having given this answer to the Pharisees, he reflected on the treatment the prophets had received from the inhabitants of Jerusalem; pathetically lamented their obstinacy, and the terrible desolation that would in a short time overtake them. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have

gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."—*Luke* xiii. 35, 45.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The blessed Jesus accepts the Pharisee's invitation a third time.—Delivers divers Parables, representing the Requisites for Admittance into the Kingdom of God; the Care of the Redeemer for every one of his People; the Reception of a penitent Sinner; and the Punishment of misusing the Benefits of the Gospel.

OUR Saviour having finished this awful exclamation and prediction, was invited by one of the Pharisees to his house. Though he knew that this invitation arose not from a generous motive, yet, as he never shunned any opportunity of doing good, even to his most implacable enemies, he accepted it. At his entering the Pharisee's house, they placed before him a man that had a dropsy, doubtless with an intention to accuse him of healing on the Sabbath-day; being persuaded that he would work a miracle in favour of so melancholy an object. Jesus, who knew the secret thoughts of their hearts, asked the lawyers

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

and Pharisees, whether it was "lawful to heal on the Sabbath-day?" But they refusing to give an answer to the question, Jesus laid his hand on the diseased person, and immediately his complexion returned, his body was reduced to its ordinary dimension, and his former health and strength renewed in an instant. So surprising a miracle might surely have convinced the Pharisees that the author must have been endued with power from on high; but, instead of being persuaded that he was a person sent from God, and laboured only for the benefit of the children of men, they were contriving how they might turn this miracle to his disadvantage. Our Lord, however, soon disconcerted their projects, by proving that, according to their own avowed practice, he had done nothing that was not truly lawful. "Which of you," said he, "shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath-day?" If a calamity happens to one of your beasts, you make no scruple of assisting it on the Sabbath, though the action may be attended with considerable labour: and surely I may relieve a descendant of Abraham, when nothing more is requisite than touching him with my hand. This argument was conclusive, and

so plain, that the grossest stupidity must feel its force, and the most virulent malice could not contradict it.

As the entertainment approached, our blessed Saviour had an opportunity of observing the pride of the Pharisees, and remarking what an anxiety each of them expressed to obtain the most honourable place at the table. Nor did he let their ridiculous behaviour pass without a proper animadversion; in which he observed, that pride generally exposed a person to many affronts, and that humility is the surest method of gaining respect. "When thou art bidden," said he, "of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him, and he that bade thee and him come and say unto thee, Give this man place, and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee: For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."—*Luke* xiv. 8, &c.

Having thus addressed the guests

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

in general, he turned to the master of the house, and said unto him, "When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind."

—*Luke* xiv. 12, 13. Be very careful not to limit thy hospitality to the rich, but let the poor also partake of thy bounty. "And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee; for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just."—*Luke* xiv. 14.

One of the Pharisees, enraptured with the delightful prospect of the happiness good men enjoyed in the heavenly Canaan, cried out, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" Blessed is he who, being admitted into the happy regions of Paradise, shall enjoy the conversation of the inhabitants of those heavenly countries; as those spiritual repasts must regale and invigorate his mind beyond expression. In answer to which our blessed Saviour delivered the parable of the marriage supper, representing by the invitation of the guests the doctrine of the gospel, and the success those beneficent invitations to the great feast of heaven should

meet with among the Jews; foretelling that, though it was attended with every inviting circumstance, they would disdainfully reject it, and prefer the pleasures of a temporal existence to those of an eternal state; while the Gentiles, with the greatest cheerfulness, would embrace the beneficent offer, and thereby be prepared to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the happy mansions of the kingdom of heaven. But as this parable was afterwards spoken by our blessed Saviour in the temple, we shall defer our observations on it till we come to the history where it was again delivered.

When Jesus departed from the Pharisee's house, great multitudes of people thronged him, to hear his doctrine; but mistook the true intention of it, expecting he was going to establish the Messiah's throne in Jerusalem, and render all the nations of the world tributary to his power. The benevolent Jesus therefore took this opportunity to undeceive them; and to declare, in the plainest terms, that his kingdom was not of this world; and, consequently, that those who expected, by following him, to obtain temporal advantages, would find themselves wretchedly mistaken; as, on the contrary, his disciples must expect to be persecuted from city to city,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

and hated of all men, for his name's sake: though it was requisite for those who would be his true followers to prefer his service to the richest grandeur and pleasure of the world, and to show by their conduct that they had much less respect and value for the dearest objects of their affections than for him. "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and his wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever does not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple."—*Luke* xiv. 26, 27.

And in order to induce them to weigh this doctrine attentively in their minds, he elucidated it with two apposite cases, that of an unthinking builder, and that of a rash warrior. The former was obliged to leave the structure unfinished, because he had foolishly begun the building before he had computed the cost; and the latter reduced to the dilemma of being ingloriously defeated, or meanly suing for peace previous to the battle, having rashly declared war before he had considered the strength of his own and his enemy's army, "So, likewise, whosoever he be of you," added the blessed Jesus, "that forsaketh not all that he

hath, he cannot be my disciple."—*Luke* xiv 33.

The publicans and sinners, roused by the alarming doctrine of our Lord, listened to it attentively. This opportunity was readily embraced by the great Redeemer of mankind, who not only condescended to preach to them the happy tidings of eternal life, but even accompanied them to their own houses; that, if possible, the seeds of the gospel might take root in their hearts. But this condescension of the meek and humble Jesus was considered by the haughty Pharisees as an action too mean for the character of a prophet. They murmured, and were highly displeased at a condescension which ought to have given them the greatest joy. But Jesus soon showed them their mistake, by repeating to them the parables of the lost sheep and piece of money. Intimating thereby the great care all prophets and pastors ought to take of those committed to their care, and the obligation they lay under of searching diligently for every wandering sinner, whose conversion is a grateful offering to the Almighty. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."—*Luke* xv. 10.

To illustrate this doctrine still farther, and show to the greatest

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

sinner the willingness of God to receive him into his grace and favour if convinced of his unworthy and lost condition in himself, and imploring forgiveness through the merits of Jesus Christ, and the renewal of his heart by the efficacious influences of his Spirit, he delivered the expressive parable of the prodigal son.

A certain man had two sons, the younger of whom, not content to live in his father's house, safe under his protection, and happy under his eye, desired his father to give him the portion of goods which fell to his share. The indulgent father did not hesitate to grant his request; but the ungrateful son had no sooner obtained what he asked of his parent, than he left the presence and neighbourhood of so kind a father, and retired into a far country, where he had an opportunity of indulging without restraint his wicked inclinations; and there he wasted his substance in riotous living. Having thus consumed the portion given him by his indulgent parent, he began to feel the miseries of want, and, to add to his misfortunes, a terrible famine arose in that land; so that he soon became acquainted with the sharp stings of hunger. In this distressed condition he joined himself to a citizen of that country, willing to try every expedient rather

than return to his kind, his merciful father, and humbly confess his faults. His master, from a just contempt of his former prodigality, employed him in the meanest and most contemptible offices; he sent him into his field to feed swine. Behold here, ye sons of extravagance, a change indeed! Behold this thoughtless prodigal, reduced at once from a life of voluptuousness and gaiety, a life of pleasure and excess, to a life of the most abject slavery, a life of penury and want. Nay, so great was his hunger, so prodigious his distress, that he would even have been contented in this miserable state to have satisfied the cravings of hunger with the husks eaten by the swine: but no man relieved him, no man showed the least compassion for him; so that the very swine were in a better condition than this miserable prodigal!

Thus miserably reduced, he was brought to himself: he had hitherto been in a state of utter forgetfulness, but now began to reflect on his happy condition while he continued with his father, before he had deviated from the paths of virtue, and to compare it with his present deplorable condition. "How many hired servants of my father," said he to himself, "have bread enough, and to spare, and I perish with hunger?" I will, therefore, unde-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

serving as I am, have recourse to his mercy and favour. "I will arise and go to my father," for such he still is; and I, though wretched and lost, am yet his son; I will therefore say unto him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son;" that happiness is too great for me to expect or desire. I have, by my behaviour, forfeited all right to so endearing, so valuable a title: make me as one of thy hired servants. I desire nothing more than that thou wouldest mercifully "receive me as one of thy hired servants."

Having thus taken a firm resolution of throwing himself at the feet of his father, and imploring forgiveness for his past offences, he did not delay to put it immediately into execution; he arose, and with the utmost expedition came to his father.

A scene of tenderness and affection, amazingly pathetic, now presents itself to our view. His kind, his affectionate father saw him while he was yet afar off: his bowels yearned towards him, he had compassion on his lost, his ruined child: paternal fondness would not suffer him to forbear: he ran to meet him, he fell on his neck, he kissed him. Encouraged by this kind reception, the son fell

down at his father's feet, and began to make confession of his faults, to plead his own unworthiness, to request his father's pardon; "Father," said he, "I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." He was not suffered to proceed any farther, the love of his parent prevented the rest; he commanded his servants to bring the best robe, and put it on him; to put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and to kill the fatted calf, that they might eat and be merry. "For this my son," said he, "was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

During this transaction, the elder brother was in the field, properly employed in his father's business; but returning from thence, and hearing the sound of mirth, music, and dancing, he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant? The servant replied that his younger brother was returned, and that his father had killed the fatted calf because he had received him safe and sound. This news greatly displeased the elder son; he was very angry, and refused to go in: upon which his father came out, and entreated him; but he replied, "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy command-



The Prodigal's return

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

ment; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.” —*Luke xv. 29, &c.*

His father, with the most amiable, condescending tenderness, replied, “Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.” Though he hath devoured my living with harlots, yet he is both thy brother and my son; thou shouldest not therefore be angry, because he has repented, and is returned, after we thought him irrecoverably lost.

Thus beautifully did our Lord represent the work of grace on the heart of man, from the first conviction of sin to the absolute confession of it; showing at the same time there can be no true confession without a thorough consciousness of guilt, a sense of our lost state, and an entire reliance on the mercy of God through Christ our Lord.

There are three expositions given of this instructive representation, each of which seems to have some place in the original design; for it should be observed, and carefully

remembered, that the parables and doctrines of our Saviour are by no means to be confined absolutely to one single point of view, since they frequently have relation to different objects, and consequently prove the riches and depth of the manifold wisdom of God.

In this parable, for instance, the great and principal doctrine intended to be particularly inculcated is, that sinners upon their repentance and faith are gladly received into favour; or, that there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth. There are, however, two other expositions of this parable: the first is that of the greatest part of the ancients, who expound it of Adam. He was made in the image of God, and endowed with many other excellent gifts, which he might have used happily had he been content to stay in his Father's house; but, like this younger brother, who foolishly desired his portion of goods to himself, that he might be his own master and under no confinement or restriction, he was unwilling to remain under the obedience of the divine precept; he was desirous of having a free use of things in Paradise, and by the devil's instigation effected a wretched independence, which caused him to break the divine command, and eat of the forbidden tree, to obtain the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

knowledge of good and evil. Thus he lost, for himself and his posterity, the substance put at first into his possession; but his heavenly Father, on his and his posterity's return, hath provided such grace and compassion for them, that they may be reinstated in their former place and favour. And the same grace not being granted to the higher order of intellectual beings, the fallen spirits, is the cause of their murmuring against God and men, represented by the answer of the elder brother in this parable.

Others, secondly, with a much greater show of probability, expound this parable of the two people, the Jews and Gentiles, who have both one Father, even God: and while they both continued in their Father's house, the true church, they wanted for nothing; there was plenty of food for the soul, there was substance enough for them both. But the latter, represented by the younger brother, possessed of his share of knowledge, went into a strange country, left God, and spent his substance, the evidence and knowledge of the Almighty; fell into idolatry, and wasted all he had in riotous living; all his knowledge of God, in the loose and absurd ceremonies of idolatry. Then behold, a mighty famine arose in that land; the worship of the true God was

banished the country. In this dreadful dearth and hunger, he joined himself to the devil, and worked all "uncleanness with greediness." But finding nothing to satisfy his spiritual hunger, this prodigal, long estranged from his Father, reflecting on his spiritual famine, and his own severe wants, humbly confessed his faults, returned to his offended Father, was re-admitted into favour, and blessed with the privileges of the gospel. But the elder brother, the Jewish church, daily employed in the field of legal ceremonies, and who had long groaned under the yoke of the law, seeing the Gentiles received into the covenant of the gospel, obtain the remission of sins, and the hopes of everlasting life, murmured against the benevolent acts of the Almighty. God, however, out of his great compassion, pleaded pathetically the cause with the elder brother, offered him all things, upon supposition of his continuing in his obedience, and declared that he had delivered the nation from the heavy yoke of the ceremonial law.

Thus the parable has a very clear and elegant exposition; the murmuring of the elder brother is explained to us without the least difficulty; and as the offence of receiving the Gentiles to pardon

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

and peace through Jesus Christ was so great a stumbling-block to the Jews, it is natural to imagine that our Saviour intended to obviate and remove it by this excellent parable.

It is, however, evident, both from the context and the occasion of delivering it, that the third interpretation is the first in design and importance. The publicans and sinners drew near to hear Jesus. This gave occasion to a murmuring among the Pharisees; and upon their murmuring, our Saviour delivered this and two other parables, to show that, if they would resemble God, and the celestial host, they should, instead of murmuring, rejoice at seeing sinners willing to embrace the doctrines of the Gospel, because there is joy, in the presence of God and his angels, over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons that "need no repentance."

The obstinacy and malicious temper of the Pharisees, who opposed every good doctrine, made a deep impression on the spirit of the blessed Jesus; he did not, therefore, content himself barely with justifying his receiving sinners in order to their being justified and saved through him, but, in presence of the Scribes and Pharisees, turned himself to his disciples, and delivered the parable of the artful

steward, as an instance of the improvements made by the children of this world in embracing every opportunity and advantage for improving their interests. "There was," said he, "a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him, that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward." —*Luke* xvi. 1, 2.

This reprimand of his lord, and the inward conviction of his own conscience that the accusation was just, induced him to reflect on his own ill-management of his lord's affairs, and in what manner he should support himself when he should be discharged from his service: "What shall I do?" said he, "for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig, to beg I am ashamed." —*Luke* xvi. 3.

In this manner he deliberated with himself, and at last resolved on the following expedient, in order to make himself friends who would succour him in his distress: "I am resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.”—*Luke xvi. 4, &c.*

To illustrate this parable, we beg leave to observe that the riches and trade of the Jews originally consisted principally in the products of the earth: they were, if we may be allowed the expression, a nation of farmers and shepherds; so that their wealth chiefly arose from the produce of their flocks and herds, and the fruits of the earth; their corn, their wine, and their oil.

Thus the steward, to secure the friendship of his lord's tenants, bound them to him under a lasting obligation; and his master, when he heard of the proceeding of the steward, commended him, not because he acted honestly, but because he had acted wisely: he commended the art and address he had shown in procuring a future subsistence; he commended the prudence and ingenuity he had used with regard to his own private interest, and to deliver him from future poverty and distress. “For the children of this world,” added the blessed Jesus, “are in their generation wiser than the

children of light.” They are more prudent and careful, more anxious and circumspect, to secure their possessions in this world, than the children of light are to secure in the next an eternal inheritance. “And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.”—*Luke xvi. 9.*

This advice of our Saviour is worthy our most serious attention, the best use we can make of our riches being to employ them in promoting the salvation of others. For if we use our abilities and interests in turning sinners from the evil of their ways; if we spend our wealth in this excellent service from pure motives, and to the glory of God; we shall have the good-will of all the heavenly beings, who will greatly rejoice at the conversion of sinners, and with open arms receive us into the mansions of felicity.

But this is not the whole application our Saviour made of this parable. He added, that if we made use of our riches in the manner he recommended, from a principle of love to God and men, we should be received into those everlasting habitations where all the friends of virtue and religion reside; because, by our fidelity in managing the small trust of temporal advantages committed

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

to our care, we show ourselves capable of a much greater trust in heavenly employments. But if, on the contrary, we do not apply our riches to the glory of God, and the good of mankind, we shall be forever banished from the abode of the blessed; because, in behaving unfaithfully in the small trust committed to us here, we render ourselves both unworthy and incapable of a share in this everlasting inheritance. "He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much. If, therefore, ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?"—*Luke xvi. 10, &c.*

And if, while you are God's stewards and servants, ye desert your trust, and become slaves to the desire of riches, you can expect no other than to be called to a strict account of your stewardship; covetousness being as absolutely inconsistent with a true concern for the cause of Christ, as it is for a man to undertake at one and the same time to serve two masters of contrary dispositions and opposite interests. "No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate

the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon."—*Luke xvi. 13.*

The hypocritical Pharisees treated this observation with derision: to which our Lord replied, "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God."—*Luke xvi. 15.*

Such is the parable, and such is our Lord's application of it; from whence the main intention and design of it is very evident. It was intended to incite us to a zealous concern for our future and eternal state, by making a due use of the means of grace, and working out our own salvation with fear and trembling; yet remembering, that it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of his own good pleasure. And if we thus employ our spiritual talents we shall, through the merits of Jesus Christ, joyfully stand at the right hand of the great judge of all the earth, and receive from him a public testimony of our faith and love. "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

took me in: naked and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.”—*Matt.* xxv. 34, &c.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Jesus rebukes the insolent Derision of the Pharisees.—Describes, by a Parable, the Nature of future Rewards and Punishments, and enforces the Doctrine of mutual Forbearance.

THE doctrines lately delivered by our Lord, being so repugnant to the avaricious principles of the Pharisees, they attended to the doctrine of our Saviour, with regard to the true use of riches, and the impossibility of men serving God and mammon; but at the same time they derided him as a visionary speculatist, who despised the pleasures of this world for no other reason than because he was not able to procure them. It is, therefore, no wonder that men who had shown such a complication of the very worst dispositions, should receive a sharp rebuke from the meek and humble Jesus: accordingly, he told them that they made indeed specious pretences to extraordinary sanctity, by outwardly shunning the company of sinners; while in private they made no scruple of having society with them, or even of joining with them in their wickedness. “Ye are they

which justify yourselves before men: but God knoweth your hearts.” Ye may indeed cover the foulness of your crimes with the painted cloak of hypocrisy, and in this disguise deceive those who look no further than the outside: but ye cannot screen your wickedness from the penetrating eye of Omnipotence, to whom all things are naked and exposed, and who judges of things, not by their appearances, but according to truth; it is, therefore, no wonder that he often abhors both persons and things that are held by men in the highest estimation: “for that which is highly esteemed among men, is abomination in the sight of God.”

This affected sanctity, while the mind is unrenewed, is an abomination to the God of purity and truth. Jesus Christ detested hypocrisy, and frequented the company of publicans and sinners, to bring about their conversion; the Mosaic dispensation, which made a difference between men, ceasing when John the Baptist first preached the doctrine of repentance; and the gospel dispensation, which admits all repenting sinners, without distinction, then commenced. “The law and the prophets were until John; since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.”—*Luke* xvi. 16.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Think not that I mean to destroy, but to fulfil, the law, which is of essential obligation; for till the law is abrogated, the least of its precepts ought not to be neglected. "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail."—*Luke xvi. 17.*

After treating of these particulars, he proceeded to consider the love of pleasure, so highly valued by the Pharisees, whose lust discovered itself by their frequent divorces, a practice which our blessed Saviour justly condemned: "Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband, committeth adultery."—*Luke xvi. 18.*

These reasons were clear and unanswerable; but the Pharisees, stupified and intoxicated with sensual pleasures, were deaf to every argument, how powerful soever, provided it was levelled against their lusts. In order to illustrate this truth, confirm his assertion, and rouse these hypocritical rulers from their lethargy, he delivered the awakening history of the rich man and the beggar.

"There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. And there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, which

was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table: moreover," so great was his affliction, so exquisite his distress, that "the dogs came and licked his sores." Thus afflicted in life, the Almighty at last released him: "the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." Nor could the rich man's wealth exempt him from the stroke of death: "the rich man also died, and was buried." But behold now the great, the awful change! "In hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and" the late despised and afflicted "Lazarus in his bosom." In this agony of pain and distress, he cried to Abraham, his earthly Father, begging that he would take pity on him, and send Lazarus to give him even the least degree of relief, that of dipping the tip of his finger in water, to cool his tongue, for his torment was intolerable. "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And be-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

sides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us that would come from thence.”—*Luke* xvi. 24, &c.

The miserable wretch, finding it impossible to procure any relief for himself, was desirous of preserving his thoughtless relations from the like distress. “Then said he, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father’s house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come unto this place of torment.”—*Luke* xvi. 27, 28. This also was a petition that could not be granted. It is too late to hope for relief when the soul is cast into the bottomless pit. They may learn, said Abraham, the certainty of the immortality of the soul from the book of Moses, and the prophets, if they will give themselves the trouble to peruse them attentively. To which the miserable object replied, that the books of Moses and the prophets had been ineffectual to him, and he feared he would be so so to his brethren. But if one actually rose from the dead, and appeared to them, they would certainly repent, and embrace those offers of salvations they had before slighted. “Nay, father Abraham; but if one went unto them from

the dead, they will repent.” But Abraham told him, that in this he was greatly mistaken, for that if they refused to believe the evidence of a future state contained in the writings of Moses and the prophets, the testimony of a messenger from the dead would not be sufficient to convince them. “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.”

This truth, asserted by Abraham, has been abundantly proved by undeniable facts; from whence it has appeared, that those who will not be convinced by a standing revelation, will not be convinced though one rose from the dead. These very Jews to whom our Saviour spoke were remarkable instances of this truth: they were fully assured that another Lazarus was, by the power of Christ, raised from the dead, after he had laid several days in the tomb: a fact which they were so far from being able to disprove that they attempted to kill Lazarus, as if, by this wicked action, they could have destroyed his evidence. Nay, they still had a more lively proof in the resurrection of Jesus himself, which they were so far from being able to deny, that they bribed the soldiers to spread the senseless tale that his disciples came by night, and stole him away while

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

they slept. So true were Abraham's words, that they who believe not Moses and the prophets, which testify of Christ and his eternal redemption, would not be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

There is not a more awakening and alarming example than this parable through the whole Gospel. it is drawn in such lively colours, that many, in all ages of the church, have considered it not as a parable, but as a real history; but, however this be, the important truths delivered in it are equally clear and equally certain. They are designed to describe the difference between this state and a future, between the children of this world and the children of light; the former having had their portion of happiness here, but that of the latter being reserved to a glorious one hereafter.

Jesus Christ shows us the period of all the prosperity of the wicked, and of all the calamities with which good men may be exercised. And what availed the luxuries of life or the magnificence of burial, to a wretch tormented in flames? Surely, the fierceness of those flames would be proportionable to the luxury in which he had formerly lived, and the sense of his torments be heightened by the delicacy he had once indulged. May those unhappy persons, who place their happiness

and glory in being clothed in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day, take warning from one greater than Moses and the prophets, from one that came from the dead to enforce it, that they pass not into that place of torment.

Having thus reprimanded the Pharisees, he took occasion to speak of affronts and offences, described their evil nature, and their dreadful punishment. "It is impossible," said he, "but that offences will come: but woe unto him through whom they come! It were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones."—*Luke* xvii. 1, 2. That is, the children of God, the followers of the Lamb, must meet with disgrace, reviling and persecution here: but woe unto those who revile and persecute them, they had better undergo the worst of temporal judgments than the awful one that shall ensue.

He spake also against a quarrelsome temper in his servants, especially in the ministers and teachers of religion, prescribed a seasonable and prudent reprehension of the fault, accompanied with forgiveness on the part of the person injured, as the best means of disarming the temptation that may arise from thence. "Take heed to yourselves:

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

if thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him: and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee saying I repent; thou shalt forgive him.”—*Luke* xvii. 3, 4.

It should be observed, that this discourse on forgiveness, uttered at a time when the Pharisees had just accused him falsely, by calling him a false teacher, sufficiently proves how truly he forgave them all the personal injuries they had committed against him; and should be a powerful recommendation of that amiable disposition which leads to the forgiveness of injuries.

But however beautiful these discourses of our Saviour appear, when examined with attention, they seem to have staggered the faith of his disciples and followers: perhaps they still imagined that he would shortly erect a temporal kingdom, and distribute among them the rewards they expected for their services. If so, they might well desire their Master “to increase their faith;” as discourses like these had a very different tendency from what might naturally have been expected from one who was going to establish the throne of David, and extend his sceptre over all the kingdoms of the earth: but, however this be, our Saviour told them, that if they had

the smallest degree of true faith, it would be sufficient for overcoming all temptations, even those which seem as difficult to be conquered as the plucking up trees, and planting them in the ocean. “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye might say unto this sycamore-tree, Be thou plucked up by the roots, and be thou planted in the sea, and it should obey you.”—*Luke* xvii. 6.

CHAPTER XXV.

*Our Lord is applied to on behalf of poor Lazarus
—Cures ten Persons of the Leprosy in Samaria,
and restores Lazarus to Life.*

SOON after our blessed Saviour had finished these discourses, one of his friends, named Lazarus, fell sick at Bethany, a village about two miles from the countries beyond Jordan, where Jesus was now preaching the gospel. The sisters of Lazarus, finding his sickness was of a dangerous kind, thought proper to send an account of it to Jesus; being firmly persuaded that he who had cured so many strangers, would readily come and give health to one whom he loved in so tender a manner. “Lord,” said they, “behold, he whom thou lovest is sick;” they did not add, Come down and heal him, make haste and save him from the grave; it was sufficient for them

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

to relate their necessities to their Lord, who was both able and willing to help them from their distress.

“When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death.” This declaration of the benevolent Jesus being carried to the sisters of Lazarus, must strangely surprise them, and exercise both their and his disciples’ faith; since it is probable that before the messenger arrived at Bethany, Lazarus had expired. Soon after, Jesus positively assured his disciples that “Lazarus was dead.”

The evangelist, in the beginning of this account, tells us, that Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus; and also, that after he had received the message, he abode two days in the same place where he was. His design in this might be to intimate, that his lingering so long after the message came, did not proceed from a want of concern for his friends, but happened according to the counsels of his own wisdom. For the length of time which Lazarus lay in the grave put his death beyond all possibility of doubt, removed every suspicion of fraud, and consequently afforded Jesus a fit opportunity of displaying the love he bore to Lazarus, as well as his own divine power in his undoubted resurrection from the dead. His sisters, indeed, were by this

means kept a while in painful anxiety, on account of their brother’s life, and at last pierced by the sorrows of seeing him die; yet they must surely think themselves abundantly recompensed by the evidence, according to the Gospel, from this astonishing miracle, as well as by the inexpressible surprise of joy they felt, when they again received their brother from the dead.

Two days being thus expired, Jesus said to his disciples, “Let us go into Judea again.”—*John xi. 7.* His disciples were astonished at this proposal, and the recollection of his late danger in that country alarmed them: “Master,” said they, “the Jews of late sought to stone thee: and goest thou thither again?” Wilt thou hazard thy life among those who desire nothing more than to find an opportunity of killing thee? “Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world; but if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.”—*John xi. 9, 10.*

By this he intended to inform his disciples that those who lived by faith, and acted under the infallible influence of the divine Spirit, could not stumble; whereas, those who followed the directions of unen-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

lightened reason were liable to perpetual error.

Jesus, having removed their needless apprehensions, and strengthened their faith, that he might clearly explain to them the cause of his going to Judea again, told them, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep." The disciples, understanding his discourse in a literal sense, replied, "Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well;" his distemper is abated, and he in all probability is recovering. It would be, therefore, highly unreasonable in us, to take two days' journey only to awake him out of his sleep. Thus they discovered their fears, and hinted to their Master, that it would be far safer to continue where they were, than to take a hazardous journey into Judea.

They were, however, mistaken; for the evangelist informs us, that he "spake of his death; but they thought he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep." Jesus, therefore, to remove any doubt, said plainly to them, "Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe." I am glad for your sakes that I was not in Judea before he died; for had I been there, and restored him to his health, your faith in me, as the Messiah, must have wanted the great confirmation it

shall now receive, by your beholding me raise him again from the dead.

Having thus given his disciples a proof of his divine knowledge, and of the designs of Providence in the death of Lazarus, our blessed Saviour added, "Nevertheless, let us go unto him." Thus Jesus, who could have raised Lazarus without opening his lips, or rising from his seat, leaves his place of retirement beyond Jordan, and takes a journey into Judea, where the Jews lately attempted to kill him; because his being present in person, and raising Lazarus again to life before so many witnesses at Bethany, where he died, and was so well known, would be the means of bringing the men of that place as well as others who should hear of it even in future ages, to receive the doctrine of a resurrection to eternal life: an admirable proof of which, and as an emblem of it, he gave them this great miracle.

Jesus having thus declared his resolution of returning into Judea, Thomas, conceiving nothing less than destruction from such a journey, yet unwilling to forsake his Master, said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." Let us not forsake our Master in this dangerous journey, but accompany him into Judea, that if the Jews, whose inveterate dislike we are well acquainted with, should take away



Hill of Samaria.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

his life, we may also expire with him.

The journey to Judea being thus resolved on, Jesus departed with his disciples, and in his way to Bethany passed through Samaria and Galilee. "And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: and they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go, show yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that as they went they were cleansed."—*Luke* xvii. 12, &c.

Among these miserable objects, one of them was a native of the country; who, perceiving that his cure was completed, came back, praising God for the great mercy he had received. He had before kept at a distance from our Saviour, but being now sensible that he was entirely clean, he approached his benefactor, that all might have an opportunity of beholding the miracle; and fell on his face at his feet, thanking him, in the most humble manner, for his condescension in healing him of so terrible a disease. Jesus, in order to intimate that those who were enlightened with the knowledge of the truth ought at least to have shown as great sense of piety and gratitude as this Samaritan, asked, "Were there

not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger."—*Luke* xvii. 17.

Jesus and his disciples now continued their journey towards Bethany, where he was informed by some of the inhabitants of that village that Lazarus was not only dead, as he had foretold, but had now lain in the grave four days. The afflicted sisters were overwhelmed with sorrow: so that many of the Jews from Jerusalem came to comfort them concerning their brother.

It seems the news of our Lord's coming had reached Bethany before he arrived at the village; for Martha, the sister of Lazarus, being informed of his approach, went out and met him; but Mary, who was of a more melancholy and contemplative disposition, sat still in the house. No sooner was she come into the presence of Jesus, than in excess of grief she poured forth her complaint: "Lord," said she, "if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." If thou hadst complied with the message we sent thee, I well know that thy interest with Heaven had prevailed: my brother had been cured of his disease, and preserved from the chambers of the grave.

Martha, doubtless, entertained a high opinion of our Saviour's power;

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

she believed that death did not dare to approach his presence ; and, consequently, if Jesus had arrived at Bethany before her brother's dissolution, he had not fallen a victim to the king of terrors. But she imagined it was not in his power to heal the sick at a distance ; though, at the same time, she seemed to have some dark and imperfect hopes that our blessed Lord would still do something for her. " But I know," said she, " that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee." She thought that Jesus could obtain whatsoever he desired by prayer ; and therefore did not found her hopes on his power, but on the power of God, through his intercession. She doubtless knew that the great Redeemer of mankind had raised the daughter of Jairus, and the widow's son at Nain, from the dead : but seems to have considered her brother's resurrection as much more difficult ; probably because he had been longer dead.

But Jesus, who was willing to encourage this imperfect faith of Martha, answered, " Thy brother shall rise again." As these words were delivered in an indefinite sense with regard to time, Martha understood them only as an argument of consolation, drawn from the general resurrection, and accordingly an-

swered, " I know that he shall rise again at the resurrection at the last day." She was firmly persuaded of that important article of the Christian faith, the resurrection of the dead ; at which important hour she believed her brother would rise from the dust. And here she seems to have terminated all her hopes, not thinking that the Son of God would call her brother from the sleep of death. Jesus, therefore, to instruct her in the great truth, replied, " I am the resurrection and the life." I am the author of the resurrection, the fountain and giver of that life they shall then receive ; and therefore can, with the same ease, raise the dead now as at the last day. " He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live : and whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die. Believest thou this ?" To which Martha answered, " Yea, Lord ; I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world." I believe that thou art the true Messiah, so long promised by the prophets, and therefore believe that thou art capable of performing every instance of power that thou art pleased to claim.

Martha, now leaving Jesus, ran and called her sister, according to his order. Mary no sooner heard that Jesus was come, than she im-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

mediately left her Jewish comforters, who increased the weight of her grief, and flew to her Saviour. The Jews, who suspected she was going to weep over the grave of her brother, followed her to that great Prophet who was going to remove all her sorrows. Thus the Jews who came from Jerusalem to comfort the two mournful sisters, were brought to the grave of Lazarus, and made witnesses of his resurrection.

As soon as Mary approached the great Redeemer of mankind, she fell prostrate at his feet, and in a flood of tears poured out her complaint: "Lord, if thou hadst been here my brother had not died." No wonder the compassionate Jesus was moved at so affecting a scene: on this side stood Martha, pouring forth a flood of tears; at his feet lay the affectionate Mary, weeping and lamenting her dear departed brother; while the Jews who came to comfort the afflicted sisters, unable to confine their grief, joined the common mourning, and mixed their friendly tears, in witness of their love for the departed Lazarus, and in testimony to the justice of the sisters' grief, for the loss of so amiable, so deserving a brother. Jesus could not behold the affliction of these two sisters and their friends without having a share in it himself;

his heart was melted at the mournful scene: "He groaned in spirit, and was troubled."

To remove the doubts and fears of these pious women, he asked them, where they had buried Lazarus? not that he was ignorant where the body of the deceased was laid: he who knew that he was dead, when so far distant from him, and could raise him up by a single word, must have known where his remains were deposited: to which they answered, "Lord, come and see." The Son of God, to prove that he was not only so, but a most compassionate man, and to show us that the tender affections of the human heart, when kept in due bounds, and that friendly sorrow, when not immoderate, and directed to proper ends, are consistent with the highest sanctity of the soul, joined in the general mourning. He wept, even at the time that he was going to give the most ample proof of his divinity.

By his weeping the Jews were convinced that he loved Lazarus exceedingly: but some of them interpreted this circumstance to his disadvantage; or, according to their mean way of judging, they fancied he had suffered him to fall by the stroke of death for no other reason in the world but for want of power and affection to rescue him. And

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

thinking the miracle said to have been wrought on the blind man, at the feast of the tabernacles, at least as difficult as the curing an acute distemper, they rather called the former in question, because the latter had been neglected. "Could not this man," said they, "which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?"

Our Lord, regardless of their question, but grieving for the hardness of their hearts and blindness of their infidelity, groaned again within himself, as he walked towards the sepulchre of the dead. At his coming to the grave, he said, "Take ye away the stone. To which Martha answered, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days;" or hath lain in the grave part of four days. She meant to intimate that her brother's resurrection was not now to be expected: but Jesus gave her a solemn reproof, to teach her that there was nothing impossible with God, and that the power of the Almighty is not to be circumscribed within the narrow bounds of human reason. "Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" *i. e.* have but faith, I will display before thee the power of Omnipotence

The objections of Martha being

thus obviated, she with the rest waited the great event in silence: and, in pursuance of the command of the Son of God, took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. Jesus had on many occasions publicly appealed to his own miracles as the proofs of his mission, though he did not generally make a formal address to his Father before he worked those miracles. But being now to raise Lazarus from the dead, he prayed for his resurrection, to convince the spectators that it could not be effected without an immediate interposition of the Divine power. "Father" said he, "I thank thee that thou hast heard me, and I know that thou hearest me always; but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me." —*John xi. 14, &c.* I entertain no doubt of thy empowering me to do this miracle, and therefore did not pray for my own sake: I well know that thou hearest me always. I prayed for the sake of the people, to convince them that thou lovest me, hast sent me, and art continually with me.

After returning thanks to his Father for this opportunity of displaying his glory, "he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth!" This loud and efficacious call of the Son of God awakened the dead;

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

the breathless clay was instantly re-animated; and he who had lain four days in the tomb obeyed immediately the powerful sound. "And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin: Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go."—*John xi. 44.* It would have been the least part of the miracle, had Jesus, by his powerful word, unloosed the napkin wherewith Lazarus was bound; but he brought him out in the same manner as he was lying, and ordered the spectators to loose him, that they might be the better convinced of the miracle; for in taking off the grave-clothes they had the fullest evidence both of his death and resurrection. For, on the one hand, the manner in which he was swathed must soon have killed him, if he had been alive when buried; which consequently demonstrated, beyond all exception, that Lazarus had been dead several days before Jesus called him again to life; besides, on stripping him the linen probably presented both to their eye and smell abundant proofs of his putrefaction; and by that means convinced them that he had not been in a delirium, but was really dead. On the other hand, by his lively countenance appearing, when the napkin was re-

moved, his fresh colour, and his active vigour, those who came near and handled him must be convinced that he was in perfect health, and had an opportunity of proving the truth of the miracle by the closest examination. There is something exceedingly beautiful in our Lord's behaviour on this occasion: he did not utter one upbraiding word either to the doubting sisters or the malicious Jews, nor did he let fall one word of triumph or exultation: "Loose him, and let him go," were the only words we have recorded. He was in this, as on all other occasions, consistent with himself; a pattern of perfect humility and modesty.

Such was the astonishing work wrought by the Son of God at Bethany: and in the resurrection of Lazarus, thus corrupted, and thus raised by the powerful call of Jesus, we have a striking emblem, and a glorious earnest, of the resurrection of our bodies from the grave at the last day, when the same powerful mandate which spoke Lazarus again into being, shall collect the scattered particles of our bodies, and raise them to immortality.

Such an extraordinary power, displayed before the face of a multitude, and near to Jerusalem, even overcame the prejudices of some of the most obstinate among them.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Many believed that Jesus could be no other than the great Messiah, so long promised; though others, who still expected a temporal prince, and therefore unwilling to acknowledge him for their Saviour, were filled with indignation, particularly the chief priests and elders. But this miracle, as well as all the rest he had wrought in confirmation of his mission, was too evident to be denied; and therefore they pretended that his whole intention was to establish a new sect in religion, which would both endanger their church and nation. "Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him; and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation."—*John xi. 47, &c.*

The common people, astonished at his miracles, will, if we do not take care to prevent it, certainly set him up for the Messiah; and the Romans, under pretence of a rebellion, will deprive us both of our liberty and religion. Accordingly, they came to a resolution to put him to death. This resolution was not, however, unanimous; for Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and other disciples of our Saviour, then members of the council, urged the

injustice of what they proposed to do, from the consideration of his miracles and innocence. But Caiaphas the high-priest, from a principle of human policy, told them that the nature of government often required certain acts of injustice, in order to procure the safety of the state. "Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not."—*John xi. 49, 50.*

The council having thus determined to put Jesus to death, deliberated for the future only upon the best method of effecting it; and, in all probability, agreed to issue a proclamation promising a reward to any person who would deliver him into their hands. For this reason our blessed Saviour did not now go up to Jerusalem, though he was within two miles of it; but went to Ephraim, a city on the borders of the wilderness, where he abode with his disciples, being unwilling to go too far into the country, because the passover, at which he was to suffer, was now at hand.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The great Prophet of Israel foretels the Ruin of the Jewish State, and enforces many important Doctrines by Parable—He blesseth the Children, as Emblems of the Heavenly and Christian Temper and Disposition.

WHILE the blessed Jesus remained in retirement on the borders of the wilderness, he was desired by some of the Pharisees to inform them when the Messiah's kingdom would commence. Nor was their anxiety on that account a matter of surprise; for as they entertained very exalted notions of his coming in pomp and magnificence, it was natural for them to be very desirous of having his empire speedily erected. But our Saviour, to correct this mistaken notion, told them, that the Messiah's kingdom did not consist in any external form of government, erected in some particular country by the terror of arms, and desolation of war; but in the subjection of the minds of men, and in rendering them conformable to the laws of the Almighty, which was to be effected by a new dispensation of religion, and this dispensation was already begun. It was, therefore, needless for them to seek in this or that place for the kingdom of God, as it had been already preached among them by Christ and his apostles, and confirmed by innu-

merable miracles. "The kingdom of God," said he, "cometh not with observation. Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you."—*Luke xvii. 20, 21.*

Having thus addressed the Pharisees, he turned himself to his disciples, and, in the hearing of all the people, prophecied the destruction of the Jewish state; whose constitution, both religious and civil, was the chief difficulty that opposed the erection of his kingdom. But because love and compassion were eminent parts of our Saviour's temper, he mentioned that dreadful catastrophe in such a manner as might tend to the reformation and profit of his hearers. He informed them, that the prelude to this final destruction would be an universal distress; when they should passionately wish for the personal presence of the Messiah to comfort them, but would be denied their request. "The days will come when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it."—*Luke xvii. 22.* He next cautioned them against those who should recommend different ways of escaping the awful catastrophe, but are utterly unable: "And they shall say to you, See here! or, see there! go not after them, nor follow them. For as the lightning, that lighteneth

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day. But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation.”—*Luke xvii 23, &c.*

The coming of the Son of man shall be sudden and unexpected. He will come in his own strength, and with great power; he will throw down all opposition, destroy his enemies with swift destruction, and establish his religion and government upon the face of the earth, as suddenly as lightning darts from one part of the heaven to the other. But before these things come to pass, he must suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation.

Notwithstanding this sudden destruction and calamity that was to overwhelm the Jews, he told them, their stupidity would be equal to that of the whole world at the time of the deluge, or that of Sodom before the city was destroyed: “And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark; and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also, as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted,

they builded, but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all: even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. In that day, he which shall be upon the house-top, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away; and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot’s wife.”—*Luke xvii. 26, &c.*

A more proper example than that of Lot’s wife could not have been produced: for if any of his hearers, through an immoderate love of the world, should be prevailed on, in order to save their goods, after they were admonished from heaven of their danger, by the signs which prognosticated the destruction of Jerusalem; or if any of them, through want of faith, should think that the calamities predicted to fall on the nation would not either be so great or so sudden as he had declared, and did not use the precaution of a speedy flight; they might behold in Lot’s wife an example both of their sin and of their punishment. He added, that those who were anxiously desirous of preserving life, from an attachment to its pleasures and vanities, should lose it; whereas those who were willing to lay down their lives in his cause, should preserve them eter-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

nally. "Whosoever shall seek to save his life, shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life, shall preserve it."—*Luke xvii. 33.*

Having foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, our blessed Saviour spake the following parable, in order to excite them to a constant perseverance in prayer, and not to be weary and faint in their minds. There was in a city, said the Saviour of the world, a judge, who, being governed by atheistical principles, had no regard to the precepts of religion, and, being very powerful, did not regard what was said of him by any man; so that all his decisions were influenced merely by passion or interest. In the same city was also a widow, who, having no friends to assist her, was absolutely unable to defend herself from injuries, or procure redress for any she had received. In this deplorable situation, she had recourse to the unjust judge, in order to obtain satisfaction for some oppressive wrong she had lately received: but the judge was so abandoned to pleasure, that he refused, for a time, to listen to her request; he would not give himself the trouble to examine her case, though the crying injustice pleaded so powerfully for this distressed widow. She was not, however, intimidated by his refusal; she incessantly importuned him, till, by

repeated representations of her distress, she filled his mind with such displeasing ideas, that he was obliged to do her justice, merely to free himself from her importunity. "Though," said he to himself, "I fear not God, nor regard man, yet, because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me."—*Luke xviii. 4, 5.*

The sentiment conveyed by our blessed Saviour in this parable is very beautiful. We hence learn, that the cries of the afflicted will, by being incessantly repeated, make an impression even on the stony hearts of wicked men, who glory in their impiety, and laugh at all the precepts of justice, virtue and religion; and, therefore, cannot fail of being regarded by the benevolent Father of the universe, who listens to the petitions of his faithful servants, and pours on their heads the choicest of his blessings.

"Hear," said the blessed Jesus, "what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you, that he will avenge them speedily."—*Luke xviii. 6, &c.* As if he had said, If this judge, though destitute of the fear either of God or man, was thus prompted to espouse the cause of the widow, shall not a

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

righteous God, the Father of his people, avenge on the wicked the many evils they have done unto them, though he bear long with them? Certainly he will, and that in a most awful manner.

Our blessed Saviour having thus enforced the duty of prayer, in this expressive parable, asked the following apposite question: "Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" As if he had said, Notwithstanding all the miracles I have wrought, and the excellent doctrines I have delivered, shall I find at my coming again, that faith among the children of men there is reason to expect? Will not most of them be found to have abandoned the faith, and wantonly ask, "Where is the promise of his coming?"

The blessed Jesus next rebuked the self-righteous Pharisees. But as these particulars are better illustrated by their opposites, he placed the characters of this species of men in opposition to those of the humble; describing the reception each class met with from the Almighty, in a parable of the Pharisee and Publican, who went up together to the temple, at the time when the sacrifice was offered, to direct their petitions to the God of their fathers.

The Pharisee, having a high opinion of his own righteousness, went

far, it is thought, into the court of the temple, that he might be as near the place of the divine residence as possible. Here he offered his prayer, giving God the praise of his supposed righteousness; and had he been possessed of any, he would have acted properly. "God," said he, "I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this Publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess."—*Luke* xviii. 11, 12.

Having thus commended himself to God, he wrapped himself up in his own righteousness: and, giving the poor Publican a scornful look, walked away, perhaps to transgress some of the weightier matters of the law, judgment, justice, and truth, and to devour the houses of distressed widows and helpless orphans. But how different was the behaviour of the humble Publican! Impressed with a deep sense of his own guilt and unworthiness, he would not even enter the court of the temple; but stood afar off, and smote upon his breast, and, in the bitterness of his soul, earnestly implored the mercy of Omnipotence. "And the Publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner."—*Luke* xviii. 13.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Specious as the Pharisee's behaviour may seem, his prayer was an abomination to the Lord; while the poor Publican, who confessed his guilt, and implored mercy, was justified in the sight of God, rather than this arrogant boaster.

This parable sufficiently indicates that all the sons of men stand in need of mercy. Both the strict Pharisee, and the despised Publican, with the whole race of mankind, are sinners; and consequently all must implore pardon of their gracious Creator. We must all ascend to the house of God, and there pour forth our prayers before the throne of grace: for there he has promised ever to be present, to grant the petitions of all who ask in sincerity and truth, through the Son of his love.

These parables were spoken in the town of Ephraim; and during his continuance in that city the Pharisees asked him, Whether he thought it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? Our Saviour had twice before declared his opinion of this particular, once in Galilee, and once in Perea: it is therefore probable that the Pharisees were not ignorant of his sentiments, and that they asked that question then to find an opportunity of incensing the people against him, well knowing that the Israelites held the

liberty which the law gave them of divorcing their wives, as one of their chief privileges. But, however that be, Jesus was far from fearing the popular resentment, and accordingly declared the third time against arbitrary divorces. The Pharisees then asked him, Why they were commanded by Moses to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? insinuating that Moses was so tender of their happiness, that he gave them liberty of putting away their wives when they saw occasion. To which Jesus answered, Because of the hardness of your hearts. Moses suffered you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it was not so. As divorce was not permitted in the state of innocence, so neither shall it be under the gospel dispensation, unless in case of adultery or fornication. "And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery; and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery."—*Matt. xix. 9.*

The disciples were greatly surprised at their Master's decision; and though they held their peace, while the Pharisees were present, yet they did not fail to ask him the reason on which he founded his determination, when they were returned home. "And in the house his dis-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

ciples asked him again of the same matter: and he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery."—*Mark* x. 12.

The practice of unlimited divorces which prevailed among the Jews gave great encouragement to family quarrels, were very destructive of happiness, and hindered the education of their common offspring. Besides, it greatly tended to make their children lose that reverence for them that is due to parents, as it was hardly possible for the children to avoid engaging in the quarrel. Our Lord's prohibition, therefore, of these divorces, is founded on the strongest reasons, and greatly tends to promote the welfare of society.

Our Saviour having, in the course of his ministry, performed innumerable cures, in different parts of the country, several persons, who earnestly desired that his blessing might rest upon their offspring, as well as themselves, brought their children to him, desiring that he would put his hands upon them, and bless them. The disciples, however, mistaking the intention, were angry with the persons, and

rebuked them for endeavouring to give this trouble to their Master. But Jesus no sooner saw it, than he was greatly displeased with his disciples, and ordered them not to hinder parents from bringing their children to him. "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God."—*Luke* xviii. 16.

Such are those, in a spiritual light, who are brought to a sense of their sins, humbled for them in the sight of God, and depend on Christ alone for salvation.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Our Lord departs from his retirement—Declares the only way of Salvation—Shows the Duty of improving the Means of Grace, by the parable of the Vineyard—Prediction of his Sufferings, and Contention of the disciples about Precedence in his kingdom.

THE period of our blessed Saviour's passion now approaching, he departed from Ephraim, and repaired, by the way of Jericho, towards Jerusalem: but before he arrived at Jericho, a ruler of the synagogue came running to him, and, kneeling down before him, asked him, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?"—*Matt.* xix 16.

This young magistrate or ruler



Christ Blessing little Children.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

showed an eager desire to converse with Jesus, and therefore asked him with great reverence, what good thing he should do to "inherit eternal life?" for nothing seemed to lie so near his heart, in his own apprehension, as that he might be saved for ever. After a proper rebuke for an improper expression, Christ directed him to keep the commandments, especially those of the second table, which can only be done by keeping those of the first. The youth, not apprehending the large extent and spiritual meaning of these precepts, with great cheerfulness and confidence said to him, Master, all these have I observed even from my infancy, and have abstained from each of the vices condemned in them. What, then, do I further need, in order to secure the glorious prize after which I am seeking? Jesus beheld this amiable youth with emotions of complacency mingled with tender compassion, who had maintained so honourable a character in such an elevated station of life, and was under such concern about another world; yet at the same time, amidst all these hopeful circumstances, was governed still by a secret fondness for the possessions he enjoyed in this. To convince the young ruler of his inordinate love of the world, Jesus called him to sell all that he had,

and give the money to the poor, and then promised him an infinitely more excellent treasure in heaven. But this requirement filled him with sorrow, that he could not obtain eternal life on more easy terms.

This melancholy instance of the pernicious influence of riches over the minds of the children of men, induced our blessed Saviour to caution his disciples against fixing their minds on things of such frightful tendency, by showing how very difficult it was for a rich man to procure a habitation in the regions of eternal happiness. "Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible."—*Matt.* xix. 23, &c.

If man be not assisted by the grace of God, it will be impossible for him to obtain the happy rewards of the kingdom of heaven; but, by the assistance of grace, which the Almighty never refuses to those who seek it with their whole heart, it is very possible

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

This answer of the blessed Jesus was, however, far from satisfying his disciples, who had, doubtless, often reflected with pleasure on the high posts they were to enjoy in their Master's kingdom. Peter seems particularly to have been disappointed; and therefore addressed his Master, in the name of the rest, begging him to remember that his apostles had actually done what the young man had refused. They had abandoned their relations, their friends, their possessions, and their employments, on his account; and therefore desired to know what reward they were to expect for these instances of their obedience? To which Jesus replied, that they should not fail of a reward, even in this life; for immediately after his resurrection, when he ascended to his Father, and entered on his mediatorial office, they should be advanced to the honour of judging the twelve tribes of Israel; that is, of ruling the church of Christ, which they were to plant in different parts of the earth; and, after this life, to a proportionate degree of glory in heaven. "Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."—*Matt.* xix. 28.

Having given this answer to Peter, he next mentioned the rewards his other disciples should receive both in this world and that which is to come. They, said he, who have forsaken all for my sake, shall be no losers in the end: their benevolent Father, who intends to give them possessions in the heavenly Canaan, will not fail to support them during their long and painful journey to that happy country, and raise them up friends who shall assist them with those necessities they might have expected from their relations, had they not left them for my sake. Divine Providence will take care they have everything valuable that can be given them by their relations, or they could desire from large possessions. They shall, indeed, be fed with the bread of sorrow, but this shall produce joys to which all earthly pleasures bear no proportion; and, in the end, obtain everlasting life. They shall leave this vale of tears, with all its pains and sorrows, behind them, and fly to the bosom of their almighty Father, the fountain of life and joy, where they shall be infinitely rewarded for all the sufferings they have undergone for his sake in this world.

Things shall then be reversed, and those who have been reviled and contemned on earth for the sake of the gospel, shall be exalted to

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

honour, glory, and immortality; while the others shall be consigned to eternal infamy. "But many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first."—*Matt* xix. 30.

These words seem also to have been spoken to keep the disciples humble; for in all probability they at first understood the promise of their sitting on twelve thrones in a literal sense; as they were ready to construe every impression to a temporal kingdom, which they still expected their Master would erect upon earth. Our blessed Saviour, therefore, to remove all thoughts they might entertain of this kind, told them, that though he had described the rewards they were to expect for the ready obedience they had shown to his commands, and the pains they were to take in propagating the gospel among the children of men; yet those rewards were spiritual, and not confined to the Jews alone, but extended also to the Gentiles, who, in point of time, should excel the Jews, and universally embrace the gospel, before that nation was converted.

To excite their ardent pressing forward in faith and good works, our Lord relates the parable of the householder, who, at different hours of the day, hired labourers to work in his vineyard:—

"The kingdom of heaven," says

our blessed Saviour, "is like unto a man that is an householder, which went early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard: And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place, and said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So, when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the good man of the house, saying,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst thou not agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen."—*Matt.* xx. 1, 2, 3, &c.

Such is the parable of the householder, as delivered by our Saviour; and from the application he has made of it, it will not be difficult to interpret it. The dispensations of religion which God gave to mankind, in different parts of the world, are represented by the vineyard. The Jews, who were early members of the true church, and obliged to obey the law of Moses, are the labourers which the householder hired early in the morning. The Gentiles, who were converted at several times, by the various interpositions of Providence, to the knowledge and worship of the true God, are the labourers hired at the third, sixth, and ninth hours. And the invitation given at the eleventh hour, implies the calling of persons in the eve of life to the knowledge of the gospel.

The law of Moses was a heavy yoke; and, therefore, the obedience to its precepts was very elegantly represented by bearing the heat and burden of the whole day. But the proselyted Gentiles paid obedience only to some particular precepts of the law, bore but part of its weight, and were, therefore, represented by those who were hired at the third, sixth, and ninth hours; while those Heathens, who regulated their conduct by the law of nature (so called) only, and esteemed the works of justice, piety, temperance, and charity, as their whole duty, are beautifully represented as labouring only one hour in the cool of the evening.

When the evening was come, and each labourer was to receive his wages, they were all placed on an equal footing; these rewards being the privileges and advantages of the gospel. The Jews, who had borne the grievous yoke of the Mosaic ceremonies, murmured when they found the Gentiles were admitted to its privileges, without being subject to the ceremonial worship. But we must not urge the circumstance of the reward so far as to fancy that either Jews or Gentiles merited the blessings of the gospel, by their having laboured faithfully in the vineyard, or having behaved well under their several dispensations.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The glorious gospel, with all its blessings, was bestowed entirely by the free grace of God, and without anything in men to merit it: besides, it was offered promiscuously to all, and embraced by persons of all characters. The conclusion of the parable deserves our utmost attention; we should meditate upon it, and take care to make our calling and election sure.

After Jesus had finished these discourses, he continued his journey towards Jerusalem, where, it is said, the chief priests and elders, soon after the resurrection of Lazarus, issued a proclamation, promising a reward to any one who should apprehend him. In all probability, this was the reason why the disciples were astonished at the alacrity of our Lord during this journey, while they themselves followed him trembling. Jesus, therefore, thought proper to repeat the prophecies concerning his sufferings, in order to show his disciples that they were entirely voluntary; adding, that though the Jews should put him to death, yet, instead of weakening, it should increase their faith, especially as he would rise again on the third day from the dead. "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished: For he

shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge him, and put him to death; and the third day he shall rise again."—*Luke* xviii. 31, 32, 33.

As this prediction manifestly tended to the confirmation of the ancient prophecies, it must have given the greatest encouragement to his disciples, had they understood and applied it in a proper manner: but they were so ignorant of the Scriptures, that they had no idea of what he meant. "And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them; neither knew they the things which were spoken."

The sons of Zebedee were so blinded by prejudice, that they thought their Master, by his telling them he would rise again from the dead, meant that he would then erect his empire, and accordingly begged that he would confer on them the chief posts in his kingdom; which they expressed by desiring to be seated, the "one on his right hand, and the other on his left;" in allusion to his placing the twelve apostles upon twelve thrones, judging the tribes of Israel. But some writers think that this ignorant request was made at some other time.

This race of mortals, ever since our Saviour's transfiguration, had

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

conceived very high notions of his kingdom, and possibly of their own merit also, because they had been permitted to behold that miracle. But Jesus told them, that they were ignorant of the nature of the honour they requested; and, since they desired to share with him in glory, asked them, If they were willing to share with him also in his sufferings? “Ye know not what ye ask: are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?”—*Matt. xx. 22.*

The two disciples, ravished with the prospect of the dignity they were aspiring after, replied without hesitation that they were both able and willing to share any hardship their Master might meet with in the way to the kingdom. To which he answered, that they should certainly share with him in his troubles and afflictions; but that they had asked a favour which was not his to give, except as prepared and promised by the Father. “Ye shall drink, indeed, of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give; but it shall be given unto them for whom it is prepared of my Father.”—*Matt. xx. 23.*

This ambitious request of the two brothers raised the indignation of

the rest of the disciples, who, thinking themselves equally deserving the principal posts in the Messiah's kingdom, were highly offended at the arrogance of the sons of Zebedee. Jesus, therefore, in order to restore harmony among his disciples, told them, that his kingdom was very different from those of the present world; and the greatness of his disciples did not, like that of secular princes, consist in reigning over others in an absolute and despotic manner. “Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant; even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister; and to give his life a ransom for many.”—*Matt. xx. 25, &c.* Ye know that rank and precedence denote merit of character here: but Christian greatness and spiritual precedence consist in humility, of which Christ your Saviour was made an eminent pattern.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

*The benevolent Saviour restores sight to the blind—
Kindly regards Zaccheus the Publican—Delivers
the parable of the servants entrusted with their
Lord's Money—Accepts the kind Offices of
Mary—Makes a public entry into Jerusalem.*

JESUS, with his disciples, and the multitude that accompanied him, were now arrived at Jericho, a famous city of Palestine, and the second in the kingdom. Near this town Jesus cured two blind men, who sat by the road begging, and expressed their belief in him as the Messiah. "And as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him. And, behold, two blind men, sitting by the way-side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David. And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace: but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David."—*Matt. xx. 29, &c.*

This importunate request had its desired effect on the Son of God. He stood still, and called them to him, that by their manner of walking the spectators might be convinced that they were really blind. As soon as they approached him, he asked them, what they requested with such earnestness? To which the beggars then answered, That

they might receive their sight. "What will ye that I shall do unto you? They say, Lord, that our eyes may be opened. This request was not made in vain: their compassionate Saviour touched their eyes, and immediately they received sight, and followed him, glorifying and praising God.

After conferring sight on these beggars, Zaccheus, chief of the publicans, having often heard the fame of our Saviour's miracles, was desirous of seeing his person; but the lowness of his stature preventing him from satisfying his curiosity, "he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore-tree, to see him; for he was to pass that way." As Jesus approached the place where he was, "he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zaccheus, make haste and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house."—*Luke xix 5.*

The publican expressed his joy at our Lord's condescending to visit him, took him to his house, and showed him all the marks of civility in his power. But the people, when they saw he was going to the house of a publican, condemned his conduct as not conformable to his character of a prophet. Zaccheus seems to have heard these unjust reflections; and therefore was willing to justify himself before Jesus and his

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

attendants. "And Zaccheus stood, and said unto the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forso-much as he also is a son of Abraham."—*Luke* xix. 8, &c.

Our Saviour, further to convince the people that the design of his mission was to seek and to restore life and salvation to lost and perishing sinners, adds, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

While Jesus continued in the house of Zaccheus the publican, he spake a parable to his followers, who supposed, at his arrival in the royal city, he would erect the long expected kingdom of the Messiah. "A certain nobleman," says he, "went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us. And it came to pass, that, when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given

the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities. And another came, saying, Lord, behold here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: for I feared thee, because thou art an austere man; thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow. And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: Wherefore, then, gavest thou not my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury? And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds. And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds. For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath, shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

him. But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me." — *Luke* xix. 12, &c.

In this parable we have the characters of three sorts of men delineated by our blessed Saviour himself: namely, the truly faithful disciples of the Messiah, who improve their every talent well; those who fear and love the Lord, but either begin late or are less diligent, and therefore are not so holy and useful as the first: and the slothful servant who buries his talent, or, which is much the same, neglects to improve it to the honour of God. And the treatment these servants met with, represents the final sentences that will be passed upon them by the awful Judge of the whole earth. The true disciples shall be rewarded with the honours and pleasures of immortality; the slothful, stripped of all the advantages they so often boasted, and loaded with eternal infamy; and shall suffer punishment, severe in proportion to the degree of their guilt.

But though this is the general sense of the parable, yet it has also a particular relation to the time when it was spoken: and was intended to teach the disciples, that though they might imagine the Messiah's kingdom was speedily to

be erected, and they were soon to partake of its happiness, yet this was not to happen before the death of their Master; that they themselves must perform a long and laborious course of services, before they received their eternal reward. That after his resurrection, when he had obtained the kingdom, he would return from his seat of majesty, and reckon with all his servants, and reward every one according to the improvements he had made in the trust committed to his care; and that he would execute, in an exemplary manner, his vengeance on those who refused to let him reign over them, and did all in their power to hinder the erection of his kingdom among others.

After speaking this parable, Jesus left the house of Zaccheus the publican, and continued his journey toward Jerusalem, where he purposed to celebrate the passover: he was earnestly expected by the people who came up to purify themselves, and who began to doubt whether he would venture to come to the feast. This delay, however, was occasioned by the proclamation issued by the chief priests, promising a reward to any who would discover the place of his retirement. "Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that, if any man knew where he were, he should

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

show it, that they might take him.”
—*John xi. 57.*

Six days before the passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, and repaired to the house of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. “There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always.”—*John xii. 2, &c.*

As Bethany was not above two miles from Jerusalem, the news of his arrival was soon spread through the capital, and great numbers of the citizens came to see Lazarus, who had been raised from the dead, together with the great Prophet who had wrought so stupendous a mi-

racle, and many of them were convinced both of the resurrection of the former, and the divinity of the latter: but the news of their conversion, together with the reason of it, being currently reported in Jerusalem, the chief priests were soon sensible of the weight so great a miracle must have on the minds of the people; and therefore determined, if possible, to put both Jesus and Lazarus to death.

Our blessed Lord, though he knew the design of the Jews upon him, also knew that it became him to fulfil all righteousness; and was so far from declining to visit Jerusalem, that he even entered it in a public manner. “When they were come to Bethphage, unto the Mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, tell ye the daughter of Sion, behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, and brought

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

the ass and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus, the prophet, of Nazareth of Galilee.”—*Matt. xxi. 1, 2, 3, &c.*

Some of the most strenuous of the deistical tribe have endeavoured to turn this circumstance into ridicule: but in this they discover the height of ignorance, because they judge by the prejudices of our own times and country. And when those who look no farther than the manners and the customs before them, examine this part of the sacred history by the standard of modern prejudices, they see, or think they see, something quite inconsistent with the gravity and dignity of the person pretending to be king of the Jews, when Christ is represented entering in triumph into Jerusalem, sitting on an ass. But however contemptible an ass, or a man riding on that creature, may be at present, it was

not so from the beginning. In many countries, and particularly in Judea, persons of the highest distinction usually rode upon asses. The governors of Israel are described, in the song of Deborah, as “riding on white asses.”—*Judges v. 10.* And the thirty sons of Jair, who was judge and prince over Israel twenty-two years, are said to ride on thirty ass-colts.—*Judges x. 4.* And another judge is recorded to have had forty sons and thirty nephews that rode on seventy ass-colts.—*Judges xii. 14.*

It may, however, be asked, supposing it was an usual thing to ride on an ass, why should this common practice be mentioned in relation to the Messiah, as a mark of distinction? Might not the prophet, upon this supposition, as well have said, he shall come walking on foot? Besides, if we turn to the book of Zechariah, where this prophecy is to be found, we shall see the person there described to be a king, a just king, and one having salvation: and what is there in this character, of riding on the foal of an ass, that is peculiar to a king, to a just king, and to one who was to bring salvation and deliverance to his people?

These questions, however difficult they at first sight may appear, are easily answered, not by considering the state and condition of kings in

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

general, but that peculiar to a king of Israel, on which the propriety of this character is founded.

If we look into the history of the rise and fall of nations, we shall generally find that their prosperity and success were proportioned to the force and power, and to the conduct and abilities, of their leaders. But with the Jews, who from slaves in Egypt became a powerful people, the case was very different. The best and greatest of their kings, and he who carried their empire to its greatest height, has left us another account of their affairs: "The people," says he, "got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them; but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them."—*Psalm* xliv. 3, &c.

When we read these, and other similar passages, we are apt to ascribe them to the piety and devotion of the Psalmist, to consider them only as acknowledgments of God's general providence in the affairs of the world; and hence are apt to overlook, or not sufficiently consider, the historical truth they contain.

It is true, indeed, that all success, in the strictest sense, should be ascribed to God: that it is he who giveth victory unto kings: but he

generally makes use of natural means; and it is no offence to his providence that kings enlist their thousands of horse and foot, to secure themselves and their dominions. But with the Jews it was very different: they were never so weak, as when they made themselves strong; never so certainly ruined, as when their force was great enough to create a confidence in themselves. For God had taken the defence of Israel upon himself; and whenever the people took it out of his hands, to place it in their own, they were sure to be undone.

Nay, so tender was God of his honour in this respect, and so concerned to justify his promise to protect Israel, in the eyes of the world, that he would not always permit natural causes to interfere in their deliverance, lest the people should grow doubtful to whom they ought to ascribe their victories; and for the same reason it was that he commanded the people to have neither horses nor chariots of war for their defence. Not because they were thought useless in war, for it is well known they were the strength of the ancient kingdoms; but because God himself had undertaken their defence, and he wanted neither horse nor foot to fight their battles.

This law, as is evident from the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Jewish history, was observed for near four hundred years, namely, till about the middle of Solomon's reign. And while David swayed the sceptre of Israel, when the kingdom was carried to its utmost height, he himself rode upon a mule, and provided no better equipage for his son on the day of his coronation. "Cause Solomon, my son," said David, "to ride upon my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon. And let Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, anoint him there king over Israel."—1 *Kings* i. 33, 34. And when that pious prince looked back, and contemplated this state of things, he might well say, "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God."—*Psalms* xx. 7.

In the reign of Solomon things quickly changed their aspect. He married the daughter of the king of Egypt, and opened a commerce between that country and his own, by which means he soon acquired an immense number of horses and chariots; and all his successors, when they had it in their power, followed his example. But what did the kingdom gain by this change? They were before a rich and flourishing people: but after breaking the law of the Most High, their wealth and power gradually declined; till at last their habitations were laid

waste, their temple and cities burned with fire, and they themselves carried captive into a strange land.

It may, perhaps, be asked, wherein the guilt of having the country full of horses consisted? There is certainly no moral crime in purchasing and keeping these creatures; but the kings of Israel were exalted to the throne on condition that they should renounce the assistance of chariots and horses, and depend upon God for success in the day of battle.

Having thus considered this law, and the consequences that resulted from the breach of it, let us now look back to the prophecy relating to the Messiah. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion: shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: Behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem."—*Zech.* ix. 9, &c.

Such is the king who was to save the descendants of Jacob: and what sort of a king could be expected? Is it possible to imagine that God would send a king to save them who would be like the kings who had undone them? Is it not more reasonable to think that he would resemble those who had been de-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

liverers of their country? kings who feared God, and therefore feared no enemy; who, though mounted on asses, and colts the foals of asses, were able to put to flight the thousands and ten thousands of chariots and horses that came against them.

The king foretold by the prophet was also to be just, meek, and lowly: but how could he have deserved that character, had he appeared in the pride and pomp of war, surrounded with horses and chariots, in direct opposition to the law of God? or, as he was to bring salvation to the people, could he make use of those means which God never had prospered, and which he declared he never would?

It appears then that it was essential to the character of a King of Israel, who was to be just and lowly, and to bring salvation with him, that he should come riding on an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. But if any doubt can yet remain, let the prophet himself explain it, who immediately after the description of the promised King, adds, "And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem:" plainly intimating, that the character given of the Messiah, that he should ride on an ass, was in opposition to the pride of their warlike kings, who, by their great strength

in chariots and horses, had ruined themselves and their people.

Thus have we undeniably shown the intention of the prophet, when he foretold that the Messiah should ride on an ass; and hence it appears that the enemies of revelation have not the least reason for turning this transaction into ridicule. Was it any reproach to Christ to ride into Jerusalem on the foal of an ass, when David, the greatest of his ancestors, and Solomon, the wisest, as long as he was wise, rode in the same manner? Can the Jews object to this circumstance, and yet talk of the glories of David, and the magnificence of Solomon, who, in the midst of all that glory and magnificence, did the very same thing? Or can they stumble at this character of the Messiah, without forgetting by what princes their ancestors were saved, and by what undone?

But to leave this digression. The prodigious multitudes that now accompanied Jesus filled the Pharisees and great men with malice and envy, because every method they had taken to hinder the people from following Jesus had proved ineffectual. "The Pharisees, therefore, said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? Behold the world is gone after him."—*John* xii. 19.

But when our blessed Saviour drew near the city of Jerusalem,



Destruction of Jerusalem Foretold.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

surrounded by the rejoicing multitude, notwithstanding the many affronts he had there received, he beheld the city with a divine generosity and benevolence which nothing can equal, wept over it, and in the most pathetic manner lamented the calamities which he foresaw were coming upon it, because its inhabitants were ignorant of the time of their visitation. "If," said he, "thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round and keep thee in on every side. And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another: because thou knowest not the time of thy visitation."—*Luke* xix. 42, &c.

Behold here, ye wondering mortals, behold an example of generosity infinitely superior to any furnished by the heathen world! An example highly worthy for them to imitate and admire.

When Jesus, surrounded by the multitude, entered Jerusalem, the whole city was moved on account of the prodigious concourse of people that accompanied him, and their continual acclamations. Jesus rode

immediately to the temple; but it being evening, he soon left the city, to the great discouragement of the people, who expected he was immediately to have taken into his hands the reins of government. "And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve."—*Mark* xi. 11.

CHAPTER XXIX.

*Jesus pronounces a Curse upon the Fig-tree—
Expels the Profaners of the Temple—Asserts his
divine Authority, and delivers two Parables.*

AT the earliest dawn, our blessed Saviour left Bethany, to visit again the capital of Judea. And as he pursued his journey, he saw at a distance a fig-tree which, from its fulness of leaves, promised abundance of fruit. This inviting object induced him to approach it, in expectation of finding figs, for he was hungry, and the season for gathering them was not yet arrived; but on his coming to the tree, he found it to be really barren: upon which the blessed Jesus said to it, "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever."—*Matt.* xxi. 19.

This action, which was purely emblematical, and prefigured the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

speedy ruin of the Jewish nation, on account of its unfruitfulness under all the advantages it then enjoyed, has, by the enemies of revelation, been represented as an action unbecoming the Redeemer of mankind. But if they had fully considered its intention, they would have been clearly convinced, that, like the rest of his miracles, it was done with a gracious intention; namely, to awaken the Jews from their lethargy, and, by timely repentance prevent the total ruin of their church and nation.

Being disappointed in finding no fruit on the fig-tree, our blessed Saviour pursued his journey to Jerusalem; and, on his arrival, went straightway to the temple, the outer court of which he found full of merchandise. A sight like this grieved his holy and righteous soul, so that he drove them all out of the temple, overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of them that sold doves, and would not suffer any vessel to be carried through the temple, saying unto them, "It is written, my house is the house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves."—*Luke* xix. 45.

St. Jerome considers this as one of the greatest of all our Saviour's miracles. And it must be owned, that the circumstances are very extraordinary: that one man should

undertake so bold, and execute so hazardous a task; one man, without a commission from Cæsar; without any countenance from the Jewish rulers; without any arms, either to terrify the multitude or defend himself. That he should cast out the whole tribe of mercenary traffickers, wrest from those worshippers of wealth their darling idol, and trample it under foot: and all this without tumult or opposition; not one of the sacrilegious rabble daring to move the hand or open the mouth.

Whosoever, I say, reflects on the fierce and ungovernable nature of an enraged populace, and considers the outrageous zeal of Demetrius and the craftsmen on a less irritating occasion, may possibly find himself almost, if not altogether, of the Latin father's opinion.

There is a tradition that a certain bright and dazzling lustre flamed from his eyes, which they were unable to bear, as the people could not behold the face of Moses for the glory that surrounded him. But as the Scriptures take no notice of this transcendent lustre, we must only adore the greatness of the fact, and, the same time, so improve this miracle to our spiritual advantage as to secure, by accepting his grace, the power of this mighty Reformer in our favour; that when he shall

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

come in glory we may be safe under the shadow of his divine wings; while he takes fearful vengeance on those who prostitute the most sacred places to mercenary purposes.

Having dispersed this venal tribe, the people brought to him the blind, the lame, and the diseased, who were all healed by the Son of God: so that the very children, when they saw the many miraculous cures he performed, proclaimed him to be the great Son of David, the long-expected Messiah.

Such behaviour not a little incensed the Pharisees; but they feared the people, and therefore only asked him, if he heard what the children said? insinuating that he ought to rebuke them, and not suffer them thus to load him with the highest praises. But Jesus, instead of giving a direct answer to their question, repeated a passage out of the eighth Psalm: "Have ye never read," said the blessed Jesus, "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength?" Giving them to understand, that the meanest of God's creatures have been made instrumental in spreading his praise.

The evening being now come, Jesus, with his disciples, left the city, and retired to Bethany, where his benevolent miracle, in raising Lazarus from the dead, had pro-

cured him many friends, among whom he was always in safety. The next morning, as they were returning to Jerusalem, the disciples were astonished at beholding the fig-tree that had been, but the morning before, declared barren, "dried up from the roots;" they had, in all probability, forgotten what our Saviour had said to this fig-tree, till its dry and withered aspect brought it again to their memory. Peter, on seeing this astonishing phenomenon, said unto Jesus, "Master, behold the fig-tree which thou cursedst is withered away!" To which Jesus answered, that whoever had faith in the Almighty, or thoroughly believed in his miracles, should be able to do much greater things than the withering of the fig-tree. "And Jesus answering, saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, that whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass, he shall have whatsoever he saith."—*Mark xi. 22, 23.*

Our Lord added, that whatsoever they should ask by faith, they should receive; and concluded by giving them directions concerning prayer, which was necessary to increase the faith he mentioned. "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

aught against any : that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive you your trespasses.”—*Mark xi. 25, 26.*

During the time the blessed Jesus remained in the temple, certain proselyted Greeks, who came up to worship at Jerusalem, desired to see him, having long cherished expectations of beholding the promised Messiah. Accordingly, they applied to Philip, a native of Bethsaida, who mentioned it to Andrew, and he told it to Jesus. Upon which our blessed Saviour told his disciples, that he should soon be honoured with the conversion of the Gentiles; “The hour is come,” said he, “that the Son of man should be glorified.” But declared, that before this glorious event happened, he must suffer death; illustrating the necessity there was of his dying, by the similitude of casting grain into the earth. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground, and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”—*John xii. 24.* Adding, that since it was absolutely necessary for him, their Lord and Master, to suffer the pains of death before he ascended the throne of his glory; so they, as his followers, must also expect to be persecuted and spitefully used for

his name’s sake; but if they persevered, and even resolved to lose their lives in his service, he would reward their constancy with a crown of glory. At the same time he intimated to the strangers that, if their desire of conversing with him proceeded from a hope of obtaining from him temporal preferments, they would find themselves sadly disappointed. “If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.”—*John xii. 26.*

Our blessed Lord was now so affected, that he uttered, in a very pathetic manner, his grief, and addressed his heavenly Father for succour in his distress. “Now is my soul troubled: and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. But for this cause came I unto this hour.”—*John xii. 27.*

This should teach us, that prayer is the only proper method of easing the mind overwhelmed with distress: but at the same time to be always resigned to the divine will; for though the weakness of human nature may shrink when persecution or sufferings of any kind appear, yet by reflecting on the wisdom, goodness, and power of God to deliver us, we ought to support every trial, however severe, with patience, as he doubtless purposes some happy ends by these afflictions.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Our blessed Lord having made a short prayer to his Father, begged him to demonstrate the truth of his mission by some token which could not be resisted. "Father, glorify thy name." Nor had he hardly uttered these words, before he was answered by an audible voice from heaven, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." The miracles thou hast already performed have glorified my name; and I will still continue to glorify it by other miracles, to be wrought before the sons of men

This voice was evidently supernatural, resembling thunder in loudness, but sufficiently articulate to be understood by those who heard our blessed Saviour pray to his heavenly Father. And Jesus told his disciples, that it was not given for his sake, but to confirm them in their faith of his mission. "This voice," said he, "came not because of me, but for your sakes." It came to confirm what I have told you relating to my sufferings, death, resurrection, and the conversion of the Gentile world to the Christian religion.

Accordingly he communicated this comfortable reflection to his disciples; telling them that the time was at hand when the kingdom of Satan should be destroyed, and that of the Messiah exalted.

"Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."—*John* xii. 31, &c.

The people, not understanding the force of this affirmation, replied, "We have heard out of the law, that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up?"—*John* xii. 34. Our Lord, in answer, told them that they should soon be deprived of his presence and miracles: and, therefore, they would do well to listen attentively to his precepts, firmly believe the doctrines he delivered, and wisely improve them to their eternal advantage; for otherwise they would soon be overtaken with spiritual blindness, and rendered incapable of inheriting the promises of the gospel. That while they enjoyed the benefit of his preaching and miracles, which sufficiently proved the truth of his mission from the Most High, they should believe on him; for by that means alone they could become the children of God. "Yet a little while is the light with you: walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you; for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light."—*John* xii 35, &c.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Having thus addressed the multitude, he retired privately. But, notwithstanding the many miracles our great Redeemer had wrought in the presence of these perverse and stiff-necked people, the generality of them refused to own him for the Messiah; being filled with the vain expectation of a temporal prince, who was to rule over all the kingdoms of the earth, and place his throne in Jerusalem. Some, indeed, even of the rulers, believed on him, though they thought it prudent to conceal their faith, lest they should, like the blind man, be excommunicated, or put out of the synagogue; valuing the good opinion of men above the approbation of the Almighty.

Nevertheless, to inspire such as believed on him with courage, he cried in the temple, "He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me."—*John* xii. 44. He that acknowledges the divinity of my mission, acknowledges the power and grace of God, on whose special errand I am thus sent. Adding, he that seeth the miracles I perform, seeth the operations of that omnipotent power by which I act. I am the Sun of righteousness, whose beams dispel the darkness of ignorance in which the sons of men are involved, and am come to deliver all who believe on me out of that palpable darkness.

You must not, however, expect that I will at present execute my judgment upon those who refuse to embrace the doctrines of the gospel; for I am not come to condemn and punish, but to save the world, and consequently to try every gentle and winning method to reclaim the wicked from the error of their ways, and turn their feet into the paths of life and salvation. They shall not, however, escape unpunished, who neglect the instructions and offers of salvation now made to them; for the doctrines I have preached shall bear witness against them at the awful tribunal of the last day; and as it has aggravated their sin, so it shall then heighten their punishment.

While Jesus was thus preaching in the temple, a deputation of priests and elders was sent from the supreme council, to ask him concerning the nature of the authority by which he acted, whether it was as prophet, priest, or king, as no other person had a right to make any alterations, either in church or state; and, if he had laid claim to either of those characters, from whom he received it? But our blessed Saviour, instead of giving a direct answer to the questions of the Pharisees, asked them another; promising, if they resolved his question, he would also answer theirs: "I also will ask you

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

one thing, which if ye tell me, I in likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?"—*Matt.* xx. 24, &c.

This question puzzled the priests. They considered, on the one hand, that if it was from God, it would oblige them to acknowledge the authority of Jesus, John having more than once publicly declared him to be the Messiah: and, on the other, if they peremptorily denied the authority of John, they would be in danger of being stoned by the people, who, in general, considered him as a prophet. They, therefore, thought it the most eligible method to answer, that they could not tell from whence John's baptism was.

Thus, by declining to answer the question asked them by Jesus, they left him at liberty to decline giving the council the satisfaction they had sent to demand. At the same time they plainly confessed, that they were unable to pass any opinion on John the Baptist, notwithstanding he claimed the character of a messenger from God, and they had sent to examine his pretensions. This was, in effect, to acknowledge that they were incapable of judging of any prophet whatsoever. Well, therefore, might the blessed Jesus say, "Neither tell I you by what

authority I do these things." You have no right to ask, since you have confessed you are unable to judge; and, therefore, I shall not satisfy your inquiry.

But because this deputation had said that they were ignorant from whence the baptism of John was, our blessed Saviour sharply rebuked them, conveying his reproof in the parable of the two sons commanded to work in their father's vineyard; and, asking their opinion of the two, made them condemn themselves.

"A certain man," said he, "had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard." But this ungracious youth very roughly answered the kind command of his father, and, without the least preface or appellation of respect, answered, "I will not." However, after reflecting on the impropriety and indecency of such behaviour to his kind and indulgent father, he repented of what he had done, and went to work in the vineyard. The father, having met with so sharp a reply from the former son, had recourse to the other, and in the same manner ordered him to work that day in his vineyard.

This son was very different from the former, and, in a very dutiful manner, said, "I go, sir." But

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

notwithstanding this seeming obedience, he delayed to do as his father desired; he did not go to work in the vineyard. The temper and behaviour of the second son were exactly conformable to those of the Pharisees. They gave the Almighty the most honourable titles, and professed the utmost zeal for his service in their prayers and praises; but at the same time refused to do any part of the work that he enjoined them. In the character of the other son the disposition of the publicans and harlots is well described. They neither professed nor promised to do the will of their Creator; but when they came to reflect seriously on their conduct, and the offers of mercy which were so kindly made them, they submitted to our Saviour, and, in consequence of their faith, amended their lives.

Having thus finished the parable, our Lord asked the Pharisees, "Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first." They did not immediately perceive that by this answer they condemned themselves, till our Saviour made a just application of the parable, in this sharp but just rebuke: "Verily I say unto you that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and

ye believed him not," nor entered into your Father's vineyard, though, like the second son, you promised in the most fair and candid manner; "but the publicans and harlots believed him," repented of their former disobedience, and entered into the vineyard.

The blessed Jesus did not only rebuke them for rejecting the preaching of the Baptist, but represented the crime of the nation in rejecting all the prophets who had been sent, since they became a nation, and among the rest, the only begotten Son of the Most High: warning them at the same time of their danger, and the punishment that would inevitably ensue, if they continued in their rebellion. The outward economy of religion, in which they gloried, would be taken from them; their relation to God, as his people, cancelled; and the national constitution destroyed: but because these topics were extremely disagreeable, he delivered them under the vail of the following parable: "There was," said he, "a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a wine-press in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country."—*Matt. xxi. 33.*

The comparison of the church to a vineyard is frequent in the sacred

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Scripture; but this particular parable, for the fuller conviction of the Jews, is expressly taken from the fifth chapter of the prophet Isaiah, with which they could not fail of being well acquainted, nor ignorant of its meaning, as the prophet at the end of it adds, "The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant; and he looked for judgment but behold oppression; for righteousness but behold a cry." Our Saviour, therefore, continued the metaphor, telling them, "That when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another." The Almighty sent the prophets to exhort the Jews to entertain just sentiments of religion, and tread in the paths of virtue; but the Jews, irritated at the prophets for the freedom they used in reproving their sins, persecuted and slew them with unrelenting fury.

Their wickedness, however, in killing these messengers, did not instantly provoke the Almighty to pour down his vengeance upon them; he sent more prophets to exhort and reclaim them, but they met with no better fate than the former. His mercy, however, still

continued; and, that no means might be left untried, he sent unto them his own Son, whose authority being clearly established by undeniable miracles, ought to have been acknowledged cheerfully by these wicked men; but how different was the consequence! "When the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. When the lord, therefore, of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto these husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons."—*Matt.* xxi 38, &c.

Shocked at this awful representation, the Pharisees exclaimed, and said, "God forbid!"—surely these husbandmen will not proceed to such desperate iniquity, surely the vineyard will not thus be taken from them. But, to confirm the truth of this, our Saviour added a remarkable prophecy of himself, and his rejection, from the 118th Psalm: "Did you never," said he, "read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders refused is become the head-stone of the corner: this is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

This rejection of the Messiah by the Jews, and the reception he met with among the Gentiles, all brought to pass by the providence of God, are wonderful events; and therefore I say unto you, the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

The chief priests and Pharisees being afraid to apprehend Jesus, he was at liberty to proceed in the offices of his ministry: accordingly, he delivered another parable, wherein he described, on the one hand, the bad success which the preaching of the gospel was to meet with amongst the Jews; and, on the other, the cheerful reception given it amongst the Gentiles. This gracious design of the Almighty, in giving the gospel to the children of men, our blessed Saviour illustrated by the behaviour of a certain king, who, in honour of his son, made a great feast, to which he invited many guests. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son." This marriage supper, or great feast, signifies the joys of grace and glory, which are properly compared to an elegant entertainment, on account of their exquisiteness and duration; and are here said to be prepared in honour of the Son of God, because they are bestowed on men in con-

sequence of his sufferings in their stead and behalf.

Some time before this supper was ready, the servants went forth to call the guests to the wedding: *i. e.* when the fulness of time approached, the Jews, as being the peculiar people of God, were first called by John the Baptist, and afterwards by Christ himself; but they refused all these benevolent calls of mercy, and rejected the kind invitations of the gospel, though pressed by the preaching of the Messiah and his forerunner. After our Saviour's resurrection and ascension, the apostles were sent forth to inform the Jews that the gospel covenant was established, mansions in heaven prepared, and nothing wanting but the cheerful acceptance of the honour designed them. "Again he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage." But these messengers were as unsuccessful as the former. The Jews, undervaluing the favour offered them, mocked at the message; and some of them, more rude than the rest, insulted, beat, and slew the servants who had been sent to call them to the marriage supper of the Lamb. "But when the king heard thereof, he was

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burnt up their city." This part of the parable plainly predicted the destruction of the Jews by the Roman armies, called here the armies of the Almighty, because they were appointed by him to execute vengeance on that once favourite but now rebellious people.

The parable is then continued as follows: The king again sent forth his servants into the countries of the Gentiles, with orders to compel all that they met with to come unto the marriage. This was immediately done, and the wedding was furnished with guests; but when the king came into the apartment, "He saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment; and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen."—*Matt. xii. 11, &c.*

By the conclusion of the parable, we learn, that the profession of the Christian religion will not save a man, unless he be saved by grace, and act from Christian principles. Let us, therefore, who have obeyed

the call, and are by profession the people of God, think often on that awful day, when the King will come in to see his guests; when the Almighty will, with the greatest strictness, view every soul that lays claim to the joys of heaven. Let us think of the speechless confusion that will seize such as have not on the wedding garment, and of the inexorable anxiety with which they will be consigned to weeping and gnashing of teeth: and let us remember that to have seen for a while the light of the gospel and the fair beamings of an eternal hope, will add deeper and more sensible horrors to these gloomy caverns. On the other hand, to animate and encourage us, let us anticipate the joyful hour which will consign us to bliss immortal.

CHAPTER XXX.

The blessed Jesus wisely retorts on the Pharisees and Herodians, who propound an intricate Question to him—Settles the most important Point of the Law—Enforces his Mission and Doctrine, and foretels the Judgment that would fall upon the Pharisaical Tribe.

THIS representation of the state of the finally impenitent appearing to be levelled at the Pharisees, they immediately concerted with the Herodians and Sadducees, on the most proper method of putting Jesus to

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

death. It is sufficiently evident, that their hatred was now carried to the highest pitch, because the most violent enmity which had so long subsisted between the two sects was on this occasion suspended, and they joined together to execute their cruel determination on the Son of God. They, however, thought it most eligible to act very cautiously, and endeavour, if possible, to catch some hasty expression from him, that they might render him odious to the people, and find something against him that might serve as a basis for a prosecution. Accordingly, they sent some of their disciples to him, with orders to feign themselves just men, who maintained the greatest veneration for the divine law, and dreaded nothing more than the doing anything inconsistent with its precepts; and, under this specious cloak of hypocrisy, to beg his determination of an affair that had long lain heavy on their consciences; namely, the paying tribute to Cæsar, which they thought inconsistent with their zeal for religion. This question was, it seems, furiously debated in our Saviour's time; one Judas, a native of Galilee, having implanted in the minds of the people a notion that taxes to a foreign power were absolutely unlawful. A doctrine so pleasing to the worldly-minded Jews could not

fail of friends, especially among the lower class, and therefore must have many partizans among the multitude that then surrounded the Son of God. The priests, therefore, imagined that it was not in his power to decide the point without rendering himself obnoxious to some of the parties: if he should say it was lawful to pay the taxes, they believed that the people, in whose hearing the question was proposed, would be incensed against him, not only as a base pretender who, on being attacked, publicly renounced the character of the Messiah which he had assumed among his friends, but also a flatterer of princes and a betrayer of the liberties of his country; one who taught a doctrine inconsistent with the known privileges of the people of God: but if he should affirm that it was unlawful to pay tribute, they determined to inform the governor, who, they hoped, would punish him as a framer of sedition. Highly elated with their project, they accordingly came; and, after passing an encomium on the truth of his mission, his courage, and impartiality, they proposed this famous question: "Master," said they, "we know that thou art true, and carest for no man; for thou regardest not the persons of men, but teachest the way of God in truth. Tell us,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

therefore, what thinkest thou, Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar, or not?"—*Mark* xii. 14, 15.

But the blessed Jesus saw their secret intentions, and accordingly called them hypocrites; to signify that, though they pretended to make conscience of, and show a regard for, the will of God, in proposing this question, he saw through the thin veil that concealed their design from the eyes of mortals, and knew that their intention was to ensnare him.

He, however, did not decline answering their question, but previously desired to see a piece of the tribute-money. The piece was accordingly produced, and proved to be coined by the Romans. Upon which our blessed Saviour answered them—Since this money bears the image of Cæsar, it is his; and by making use of it you acknowledge his authority. But, at the same time that you discharge your duty to the civil magistrate, you should never forget the duty you owe to your God; but remember, that as you profess to bear the image of the great, the omnipotent King, you are his subjects, and ought to love him with all your heart, and serve him to the very utmost of your power.

The Pharisees and their followers, under a pretence of religion, often

justified sedition: but the Herodians, in order to ingratiate themselves with the reigning powers, made them a compliment of their consciences, complying with whatever they enjoined, however opposite their commands might be to the divine law. Our Lord, therefore, adapted his answer to them both, exhorting them, in their regards to God and the magistrate, to give each his due; there being no inconsistency between their rights, when their rights only are insisted on.

So unexpected an answer quite disconcerted and silenced these crafty enemies. They were astonished both at his having discovered their design, and his wisdom in avoiding the snare they had so artfully laid for him. "When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way."—*Matt.* xxii. 22.

Though our Lord thus wisely obviated their crafty designs, enemies came against him from every quarter. The Sadducees, who denied the doctrine of a future state, together with the existence of angels and spirits, came forward to the charge; proposing to him their strongest argument against the resurrection, which they deduced from the law given by Moses with regard to marriage. "Master," said they, "Moses wrote unto us, If any man's

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

brother die, having a wife, and he die without children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. There were, therefore, seven brethren; and the first took a wife, and he died without children. And the second took her to wife, and he died childless. And the third took her; and in like manner the seven also. And they left no children, and died. Last of all, the woman died also. Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of them is she? for seven had her to wife."—*Luke* xx. 28, &c.

The Sadducees, who believed the soul to be nothing more than a refined matter, were persuaded, that if there were any future state, it must resemble the present; and that, being in that state material and mortal, the human race could not be continued, nor the individuals rendered happy, without the pleasures and conveniences of marriage. And hence considered it as a necessary consequence of the doctrine of the resurrection, or a future state, that every man's wife should be restored to him.

But this argument our blessed Saviour soon confuted, by telling the Sadducees they were ignorant of the power of God, who had created spirit as well as matter, and who can render man completely happy in the enjoyment of himself. He

also observed, that the nature of the life obtained in a future state made marriage altogether superfluous, because, in the world to come, men being spiritual and immortal like the angels, there was no need of natural means to propagate or continue the kind. "Ye do err," said the blessed Jesus, "not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage."—*Matt.* xxii. 29, 30. Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection."—*Luke* xx. 36. Hence we may observe, that good men are called the children of the Most High, from their inheritance at the resurrection, and particularly on account of their being adorned with immortality.

Having thus shown their folly and unbelief, he proceeded to show that they were also ignorant of the Scriptures, and particularly of the writings of Moses, from whence they had drawn their objection, by demonstrating from the very law itself the certainty of a resurrection, at least that of just men: and consequently quite demolished the opinion of the Sadducees, who, believing the materiality of the soul, affirmed that men were annihilated

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

after their death, and that their opinion was founded on the writings of Moses. "Now," said our Saviour, "that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush, when he called the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living; for all live unto him."—*Luke* xx. 37, 38. As if he had said, The Almighty cannot properly be called the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, unless they exist; for "he is not a God of the dead, but of the living." Since, therefore, Moses called him the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, long after these venerable patriarchs were dead, the relation denoted by the word of God still subsisted between them; consequently they were not annihilated, as you pretend, but are still in being, and continue to be servants of the Most High.

This argument effectually silenced the Sadducees, and agreeably surprised the people, to see the objection hitherto thought impregnable totally abolished, and the sect they had long abominated fully confuted. "And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine."—*Matt.* xxii. 33.

Nor could even the Pharisees refrain from giving the Saviour of man-

kind the praise due to his superlative wisdom; for one of the Scribes desired him to give his opinion on a question often debated among their teachers; namely, which was the great commandment of the law? The true reason for their proposing this question was to try whether he was as well acquainted with the sacred law, and the debates that had arisen on different parts of it, as he was ready in deriving arguments from the inspired writers, to destroy the tenets of those who denied a future state.

In order to understand the question proposed to our blessed Saviour by the Scribe, it is necessary to observe, that some of the most learned rabbis had declared that the law of sacrifice was the great commandment; some, that it was the law of circumcision; and others, that the law of meat and washings had merited that title.

Our blessed Saviour, however, showed that they were all mistaken, and that the great commandment of the law is the duty of piety: and particularly mentioned that comprehensive summary of it given by Moses; "Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

first commandment." — *Mark* xii. 29, 30.

The first and chief commandment is, to give God our hearts. The Divine Being is so transcendently amiable in himself, and has, by the innumerable benefits conferred upon us, such a title to our utmost affection, that no obligation bears any proportion to that of loving him. The honour assigned to this precept proves that piety is the noblest act of the human mind; and that the chief ingredient in piety is love, founded on a clear and extensive view of the divine perfections, harmonising in our redemption by Christ, a permanent sense of his benefits, and a deep conviction of his being the sovereign good, our portion, and our happiness. But it is essential to love that there be a delight in contemplating the beauty of the object beloved, whether that beauty be a matter of sensation or reflection; that we frequently, and with pleasure, reflect on the benefits conferred on us by the object of our affections; that we have a strong desire of pleasing him, great fear of doing anything to offend him, and a sensible joy in thinking we are beloved in return. Hence the duties of devotion, prayer, and praise, are the most natural and genuine exercise of the love of God. Nor is this grace so much any single

affection as the continual bent of all the affections and powers of the soul: consequently to love God is, as much as possible to direct the whole soul towards him, and to exercise all its faculties on him as its chief object.

Accordingly, the love of God is described in Scripture by the several operations of the mind, a following hard after God; namely, by intense contemplation; a sense of his perfections, gratitude for his benefits, trust in his goodness, attachment to his service, resignation to his providence, the obeying his commandments, admiration, hope, fear, &c.; not because it consists in any of those singly, but in them all together; for to content ourselves with partial regards to the Supreme Being, is not to be affected towards him in the manner we ought to be, and which his perfections claim.

Hence the words of the precept are, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength;" that is, with the joint force of all thy faculties; and, therefore, no idol whatsoever must partake of the love and worship that is due to him. But the beauty and excellency of this state of mind is best seen in its effects: for the worship and obedience flowing from such an universal bent of

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

the soul towards God, is as much superior to the worship and obedience arising from partial considerations, as the brightness of the sun is to any picture that can be drawn of that luminary.

For example, if we look upon God only as a stern lawgiver, who can and will punish our rebellion, it may indeed force an awe and dread of him, and as much obedience to his laws as we think will satisfy him; but can never produce that constancy in our duty, that delight in it, and that earnestness to perform it in its utmost extent, which are produced and maintained in the mind by the sacred fire of divine love, or by the bent of the whole soul turned towards God as a reconciled father; a frame the most excellent that can be conceived, and the most to be desired, because it constitutes the highest perfection and real happiness of the creature.

Again, this commandment requires us to fear God; and certainly we cannot love the Lord our God, unless we fear and reverence him: for as the love, so the fear of God, is the sum of all the commandments, and indeed the substance of all religion. Prayer and praise are the tribute and homage of religion: by the one we acknowledge our dependence upon God; by the other we confess that all our blessings and

comforts are from him. Such, therefore, as neither pray to God nor praise him cannot be said to have a God; for they acknowledge none, but are gods to themselves. And as the love and fear of God are often used in Scripture for his whole worship and service, so is this invocation of his name: "Pour out thy fury upon the heathen, and upon the families that have not called upon thy name;" that is, those who do not worship and serve him.

But to return. Our blessed Saviour having thus answered the question put to him by the Scribe, added, that the second commandment was that which enjoined the love of our neighbour.

This had indeed no relation to the lawyer's question concerning the first commandment; yet our blessed Lord thought proper to show him which was the second, probably because the men of this sect did not acknowledge the importance and precedence of love to their neighbour; or because these were remarkably deficient in the practice of it, as Jesus himself had often found in their attempts to kill him. "And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

This principle of love to God will be also fruitful of every good work.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

It will make us really perform the duties of all relations in which we stand. And because love worketh no ill to his neighbour, therefore it is the fulfilling of the law; for it will prompt us to a cheerful and ready performance of every office, whether of justice or charity, that we owe to our neighbour. All the best things we can do, if destitute of this principle, will appear either to be the effect of hypocrisy, or done to procure the esteem of men. Without love, a narrowness of soul will shut us up within ourselves, and make all we do to others only as a sort of merchandise, trading for our own advantage. It is love only that opens our hearts to consider other persons, and to love them on their own account, or rather on account of God, who is love.

Those who possess such a temper of mind, have a constant calm within, and are not disturbed with passion, jealousy, envy, or ill-nature. They observe and rejoice in the happiness of others; they are glad to see them easy, and share with them in their joy and felicity; not fretting or complaining, though they enjoy less than their neighbours.

It is true, love has a very different effect; for the same temper will render many so considerate of the misfortunes of others, as to sym-

pathise with them in their distress, and be greatly affected with such objects of compassion as it is not in their power to assist. But there is a real pleasure even in this compassion, as it melts us to the greatest tenderness, and proves us to be men and Christians. The good man, by the overflowings of his love, is sure that he is in favour with his Maker, because he loves his neighbour. His soul dwells at ease; there is sweetness in all his thoughts and wishes. This makes him clear in his views of every kind, and renders him grateful to all good men around him.

This charitable temper also maintains in him a constant disposition for prayer. A charitable man, who has occasion to forbear and forgive others, and to return good for evil, dares, with a humble assurance, to lay claim to mercy and pardon, through the merits alone of his blessed Redeemer.

But we return to the Scribe, who was astonished at the justness of our Saviour's decisions, and answered, That he had determined rightly, since there is but one supreme God, whom we must all adore: and if we love him above all temporal things, and our neighbour as ourselves, we worship him more acceptably than if we sacrifice to him "all the cattle upon a thousand hills." Our blessed

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Lord highly applauded the piety and wisdom of this reflection, by declaring that the person who made it was not far from the kingdom of God.

As the Pharisees, during the course of our Saviour's ministry, had proposed to him many difficult questions, with intent to prove his prophetic gifts, he now, in his turn, thought proper to make a trial of their knowledge in the sacred writings. For this purpose he asked their opinion of a difficulty concerning the Messiah's pedigree. "What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David."—*Matt. xxii. 32.* I know, answered Jesus, you say Christ is the son of David; but how can you support your opinion, or render it consistent with the words of David, who himself calls him Lord: and "how is he his son?" It seems the Jewish doctors did not imagine that their Messiah would be endued with any perfections greater than those that might be enjoyed by human nature: for though they called him the Son of God, they had no notion that he had a divine power from heaven, and therefore could not pretend to solve the difficulty.

The latter question, however, might have convinced them of their error: for if the Messiah was only

to be a secular prince, as they supposed, and to rule over the men of his own time, he never could have been called Lord by persons who died before he was born; far less would so mighty a prince as David, who was also his progenitor, have conferred on him that title. Since, therefore, he rules over not only those of former ages, but even over the kings from whom he was himself descended, and his kingdom comprehends the men of all countries and times, past, present, and to come; the doctors, if they had thought accurately upon the subject, should have expected in their Messiah a king different from all other kings. Besides, he is to sit at God's right hand, "till all his enemies are made his footstool."

Such solid reasoning gave the people a high opinion of his wisdom; and showed them how far he was superior to their most renowned rabbins, whose arguments, to prove their opinions and answers to the objections which were raised against him, were in general very weak and trifling. Nay, his foes themselves, from the repeated proofs they had received of the prodigious depth of his understanding, were impressed with such an opinion of his wisdom that they judged it impossible to entangle him in his talk. Accordingly they left off attempting it,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

and from that day forth troubled him no more with their insidious questions.

But having mentioned the final conquest and destruction of his enemies, who were to be made his footstool, agreeably to the prediction of the royal psalmist, he turned towards his disciples; and, in the hearing of the multitude, solemnly cautioned them to beware of the Scribes and Pharisees, insinuating thereby who the enemies were whose destruction he had mentioned. "The Scribes and the Pharisees," said he, "sit in Moses' seat. All, therefore, whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do: but do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not."—*Matt.* xxiii. 2, 3.

While they teach the doctrines before delivered by Moses, observe all they say; but by no means imitate their practices; for they impose many precepts on their disciples, which they never perform themselves. "For they bind heavy burthens, and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men."—*Matt.* xxiii. 4, 5.

The difficult precepts they impose on others are never regarded by these hypocrites; and any good action they may happen to perform

is vitiated by the principle from whence it proceeds. They do it only with a view to gain popular applause, and not from a regard to God; far less from a love of goodness. They are proud and arrogant to excess, as is plain from their affected gravity in their clothes from the anxiety they discover lest they should not obtain the principal seats in the public assemblies, and from their affecting to be saluted in the streets with the sounding titles of Rabbi and Father. "They make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi."—*Matt.* xxiii 5, 6, 7.

The word Rabbi signifies properly, my Master, and was given to those men who had rendered themselves remarkable for the extent of their learning; it is therefore no wonder that the proud and supercilious Pharisees were fond of a title, which so highly complimented their understandings, and gave them great authority with their followers.

But the disciples of the blessed Jesus were to decline this title, because the thing signified by it belonged solely to their Master, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and because

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

they owed no part of their knowledge to themselves, but derived it entirely from him who came down from heaven. "But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven."—*Matt.* xxiii. 8, 9. Life, with all its blessings, comes from God, and men wholly depend upon him; all praise and thankfulness, therefore, should ultimately be referred to him: so that if any one teacheth rightly, not the teacher, but the wisdom of the Almighty, is to be praised, which exerts and communicates itself by him.

Nor were the disciples of our blessed Saviour to accept the title of master, or leader, which the Jewish doctors also courted; because, in point of commission and inspiration, they were all equal, neither had they any title to rule the consciences of men, except by virtue of the inspiration which they had received from their Master, to whom alone the prerogative of infallibility belonged. "Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ."—*Matt.* xxiii. 10.

The divine Teacher, however, did not intend by this to intimate that it was sinful to call men by the stations they held in the world: he

only intended to reprove the simplicity of the common people, who loaded their teachers with praises, and forgot to ascribe anything to God; and to root out of the minds of his apostles the Pharisaical vanity which decked itself with honour belonging solely to the Creator of the universe. Accordingly, that he might instil into their hearts humility, to dispose them to do good offices to one another as occasion offered, he assured them it was the only road to true greatness; for by assuming what did not properly belong to them, they should be despised both by God and men. Whereas, those who did not disdain to perform the meanest offices of love to their brethren, should enjoy a high degree of the divine favour.

The above discourses greatly incensed the Scribes and Pharisees, as they were pronounced in the hearing of many of that order; it is, therefore, no wonder that they watched every opportunity to destroy him. But this was not a time to put their bloody designs in execution; the people set too high a value on his doctrine, to suffer any violence to be offered to his person; and as this was the last sermon he was ever to preach in public, it was necessary that he should use some severity, as all his mild persuasions proved ineffectual.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

He therefore denounced, in the most solemn manner, dreadful woes against them, not on account of the personal injuries he had received from them, but on account of their excessive wickedness.

They were public teachers of religion ; and, therefore, should have used every method in their power to recommend its precepts to the people, and to have been themselves shining examples of every duty it enjoined ; but, on the contrary, they abused every mark and character of goodness for all the purposes of villainy ; and under the cloak of a severe and sanctified aspect they were malicious, implacable, lewd, covetous, and rapacious. In a word, instead of being reformers, they were the corrupters of men, and consequently their wickedness deserved the greatest reproof that could be given by the great Redeemer of mankind. “Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men : for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye devour widow’s houses, and for a pretence make long prayers : therefore, ye shall receive the greater damnation. Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ; for ye compass sea and

land to make one proselyte ; and when he is made, ye make him two-fold more the child of hell than yourselves.”—*Matt.* xxiii. 13, &c.

The punishment you shall suffer will be terribly severe, because you have given a wrong interpretation of the ancient prophecies concerning the Messiah, and done all that is in your power to hinder the people from repenting of their sins, and believing the gospel ; because you have committed the grossest iniquities, and, under the cloak of religion, have devoured the substance of widows and orphans, hoping to hide your villanies by long prayers ; because ye have expressed the greatest zeal imaginable in making proselytes, not with a view to render the Gentiles more wise and virtuous, but to acquire their riches, and a command over their consciences ; and instead of teaching them the precepts of virtue, and the great duties of religion, you confine them to superstitious and ceremonial institutions ; and hence they often relapse into their old state of heathenism, and become more wicked than before their conversion, and consequently liable to a more severe sentence.

He also exposed their doctrine concerning oaths ; and declared, in opposition to their abominable tenets, that every oath, if the matter

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

of it be lawful, is obligatory; because, when men swear by any part of the creation, it is an appeal to the Creator himself; for in any other light an oath of this kind is absolutely ridiculous, the object having neither knowledge of the fact nor power to punish the perjury. "Wo unto you, ye blind guides! which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor. Ye fools, and blind! for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? And, whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. Ye fools, and blind! for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? Whoso, therefore, shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it and by all things thereon. And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it and by him that dwelleth therein. And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God and by him that sitteth thereon."—*Matt.* xxiii. 16, &c.

He likewise reprehended their superstitious practices, in observing the minutest parts of the ceremonial precepts of the law, and at the same time utterly neglecting the eternal and indispensable rules of righteous-

ness. "Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint, and anise, and cummin; and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel."—*Matt.* xxiii. 23, &c.

Their hypocrisy did not escape the censure of the Son of God; they spared no pains to appear virtuous in the eyes of the world, and maintain an external conduct that should acquire the praises of men; but at the same time neglected to adorn their souls with the robe of righteousness, which is the only ornament that can render them dear in the sight of their Maker. "Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee! cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also."—*Matt.* xxiii. 25. Cleanse first thy mind, the inward man, from evil dispositions and affections, and the outward behaviour will of course be virtuous and praiseworthy.

Moreover, he animadverted upon the success of their hypocrisy. They deceived the simple and unthinking

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

portion of mankind with their pretended sanctity, appearing like whited sepulchres, beautiful on the outside, while their inward parts were full of uncleanness. "Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." — *Matt.* xxiii. 27, 28.

He also reprov'd the pains they had taken in adorning the sepulchres of the prophets; because they pretended a great veneration for their memories, and even condemned their fathers who killed them, saying, that if they had lived in the days of their fathers they would have opposed such great wickedness; while at the same time all their actions abundantly proved that they still cherished the same spirit they condemned in their fathers, persecuting the messengers of the Most High, particularly his only begotten Son, whom they were determined to destroy. "Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our

fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets." — *Matt.* xxiii. 29, &c.

He added, that the Divine Being was desirous of trying every method for their conversion, though all these instances of mercy were slighted, and that they must expect such terrible vengeance as should be a standing monument of the divine displeasure against all the murders committed by the sons of men from the foundation of the world.

Having thus laid before them their heinous guilt and dreadful punishment, he was, at the thought of the calamities which were soon to fall upon them, exceedingly moved, and his breast filled with sensations of pity to such a degree, that, unable to contain himself, he broke forth into tears, bewailing the hard lot of the city of Jerusalem; for, as its inhabitants had more deeply imbrued their hands in the blood of the prophets, they were to drink more deeply of the punishment due to such crimes. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

under her wings, and ye would not ! Behold your house is left unto you desolate.”—*Matt.* xxiii. 37, &c.

This benevolent as well as pathetic exclamation of our blessed Lord, cannot fail to excite in the pious mind the warmest emotions of love to the gracious Saviour of mankind, as well as pity for that once chosen but since degenerate race. How often had the Almighty called upon them to return from their evil way, before he sent his only begotten Son into the world ! How often, how emphatically, did the compassionate Jesus entreat them to embrace the merciful terms now offered them by the Almighty ; and with what unconquerable obstinacy did they refuse the benevolent offers, and resist the most winning expressions, of the divine love ! By the word *house*, our blessed Saviour meant the temple, which was from that time to be left unto them desolate ; the glory of the Lord, which Haggai had prophesied should fill the second house, was now departing from it. Adding, “ I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”—*Matt.* xxiii. 39. As if he had said : As ye have killed the prophets, and persecuted me, whom the Father hath sent from the courts of heaven, and will shortly put me, who am the

Lord of the temple, to death, your holy house shall be left desolate, and your nation totally deserted by me ; nor shall you see me any more, till ye shall acknowledge the dignity of my character and the importance of my mission, and say with the whole earth, “ Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

Thus did the blessed Jesus strip the Scribes and Pharisees of their hypocritical mask. He treated them with severity, because their crimes were of the blackest dye : and hence we should learn to be really good, and not flatter ourselves that we can cover our crimes with the cloak of hypocrisy from that piercing eye from which nothing is concealed.

The people could not fail being astonished at these discourses, as they had always considered their teachers as the most righteous amongst the sons of men. Nay, the persons themselves against whom they were levelled were confounded, because their own consciences convinced them of the truth of every particular laid to their charge. They therefore knew not what course to pursue ; and, in the midst of their hesitation, they let Jesus depart, without making any attempt to seize him, or inflict on him any kind of punishment.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Our Saviour commends even the smallest Act, because it proceeded from a truly benevolent Motive.

—Predicts the Demolition of the magnificent Temple of Jerusalem, and delivers several instructive Parables.

JESUS, the infallible preacher of righteousness, having thus exposed the secret practices of the Scribes and Pharisees repaired with his disciples into the court of the women, called the treasury, from several chests being fixed to the pillars of the portico surrounding the court, for receiving the offerings of those who came to worship in the temple. While he continued in this court, "He beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury. For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living."—*Mark* xii. 41, &c.

Though the offering given by this poor widow was in itself very small, yet, in proportion to the goods of life she enjoyed, it was remarkably large: for it was all she had, even

all her living. In order, therefore, to encourage charity, and show that it is the disposition of the mind, not the magnificence of the offering, that attaches the regard of the Almighty, the Son of God applauded this poor widow, as having given more, in proportion, than any of the rich. Their offerings, though great in respect of hers, were but a small part of their estates; whereas her offering was her whole stock. And from this passage of the gospel we should learn that the poor, who in appearance are denied the means of doing charitable offices, are encouraged to do all they can. For how small soever the gift may be, the Almighty, who beholds the heart, values it, not according to what it is in itself, but according to the disposition with which it is given.

On the other hand, we should learn from hence, that it is not enough for the rich that they exceed the poor in the gifts of charity; they should bestow in proportion to their income; and they would do well to remember, that a little given, where a little only is left, appears a much nobler offering in the sight of the Almighty, and discovers a more benevolent and humane temper of mind, than sums much larger bestowed out of a plentiful abundance.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The disciples now remembered that their Master, at the conclusion of his pathetic lamentation over Jerusalem, had declared that the temple should not any more be favoured with his presence, till they should say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

A declaration of this kind could not fail of greatly surprising his disciples; and therefore, as he was departing from that sacred structure, they desired him to observe the beauty of the building; insinuating that they thought it strange he should intimate an intention of leaving it desolate; that so glorious a fabric, celebrated in every corner of the earth, was not to be deserted rashly; and that they should think themselves supremely happy when he, as the Messiah and descendant of David, should take possession of it, and erect his throne in the midst of Jerusalem. And as they went out of the temple, one of his disciples said unto him, "Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!"

The eastern wall of the temple, which fronted the mount of Olives, whither the disciples, with their Master, were then retiring, was built from the bottom of the valley to a prodigious height, with stones of an incredible bulk, firmly compacted together, and therefore made a very

grand appearance at a distance. The eastern wall is supposed to have been the only remains of Solomon's temple, and had escaped when the Chaldeans burnt it. But this building, however strong or costly it appeared, our Saviour told them, should be totally destroyed. "Seest thou," said he, "these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down."—*Mark* xiii. 2.

That noble edifice, raised with much labour, and at a vast expense, shall be rased to the very foundation. The disciples, therefore, when they heard their Master affirm that not so much as one of these enormous stones, which had withstood the fury of Nebuchadnezzar's army, and survived the destructive hand of time, was to be left one upon another, they perceived that the whole temple was to be demolished, but did not suspect that the sacrifices were to be taken away, and a new mode of religion introduced, which rendered the temple unnecessary. They therefore flattered themselves that the fabric then standing, however glorious it might appear, was too small for the numerous worshippers who would frequent it, when all the nations of the world were subject to the Messiah's kingdom; and was therefore to be pulled down in order to be

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

erected on a more magnificent plan, suitable to the idea they had conceived of his future empire. Filled with these pleasing imaginations, they received the news with pleasure, meditating, as they walked to the mountain, on the glorious things which were shortly to come to pass.

When they arrived on the mount of Olives, and their Master had taken his seat on some eminence, from whence they had a prospect of the temple and part of the city, his disciples drew near, to know when the demolition of the old structure was to happen, and what were to be the signs of his coming, and of the end of the world. "And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying 'Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?'" — *Matt.* xxiv. 3.

The disciples, by this request, seemed desirous of knowing what signs should precede the erection of that extensive empire, over which they supposed the Messiah was to reign; for they still expected he would govern a secular kingdom. They, therefore, connected the demolition of the temple with their Master's coming, though they had not the least notion that he was to destroy the nation, and

change the form of religious worship.

They, therefore, meant by the "end of the world," or, as the words should have been translated, "the end of the ages," the period of the political government then executed by heathen procurators; and considered their Master's coming to destroy the constitution then subsisting, as a very desirable event. They also thought the demolition of the temple proper, as they expected a larger and more superb building, proportioned to the number of the Messiah's subjects, would be erected in its stead.

That this is the real sense of the disciples' question, will sufficiently appear, if we consider that the disciples were delighted with the prospect; whereas, if they had meant, by the end of the world, the final period of all things, the destruction of the temple would have exhibited to them, in their present temper of mind, a melancholy prospect, which they could not have beheld without a deep concern.

Our blessed Saviour, therefore, was careful to convince them of their mistake, by telling them, that he was not come to rule a secular empire, as they supposed, but to punish the Jews for their perfidy and rebellion, by destroying both

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

their temple and nation. "Take heed," said he, "that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many."

This caution was far from being unnecessary, because, though the disciples were to see their Master ascend into heaven, they might take occasion from the prophecy to think that he would appear again on earth, and, therefore, be in danger of seduction by the false Christs who should arise. "And when ye shall hear of wars, and rumours of wars, see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass; but the end is not yet." Before this nation and temple are destroyed, terrible wars will happen in the land: "For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places."—*Matt.* xxiv. 7.

These are the preludes of the important event, forerunners of the evils which shall befall this nation and people. At the same time, you shall meet with hot persecutions; walk, therefore, circumspectly, and arm yourselves both with patience and fortitude, that ye may be able to perform your duty through the whole course of these persecutions; for ye shall be brought before the

great men of the earth, for my sake. "But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate; but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye; for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost."—*Mark* xiii. 11.

During this time of trouble and confusion, he told them, the perfidy of mankind should be so great towards one another, that "Brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death." The unbelieving Jews, and apostate Christians shall commit the most enormous and inhuman crimes. It is, therefore, no wonder that the perfidy and wickedness of such pretended Christians should discourage many disciples, and greatly hinder the propagation of the gospel. But he who lives by faith during these persecutions, and is not led away by the seduction of false Christians, shall escape that terrible destruction, which, like a deluge, will overflow the land.

And when Jerusalem shall be surrounded with armies—pagan armies—bearing in their standards the images of their gods, the abomination of desolation mentioned by the pro-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

phet Daniel; then let him who readeth the predictions of that prophet understand, that the end of the city and sanctuary, together with the ceasing of sacrifices and oblations, which they predicted, is come, and consequently the final period of the Jewish polity.

“Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out.”—*Luke* xxi. 21. “Let him which is on the house-top not come down to take anything out of his house; neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes.”—*Matt.* xxiv. 17, 18. Then shall be fulfilled the awful predictions of the prophet Daniel, and the dreadful judgments denounced against the impenitent and unbelieving.

In those days of vengeance, the women who are with child, and those who have infants hanging at their breasts, shall be particularly unhappy, because they cannot flee from the impending destruction. “But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter,” when the badness of the roads and the rigour of the season will render speedy travelling very troublesome, if not impossible; “neither on the Sabbath-day,” when you shall think it unlawful. “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of

the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.” This is confirmed by what Josephus tells us, that no less than eleven hundred thousand perished in the siege.

The heavenly Prophet added, that except the days of tribulation should be shortened, none of the inhabitants of Jerusalem or Judea, of whom he was speaking, should escape destruction: in confirmation of which, Josephus tells us that the quarrels which raged during the siege were so fierce and obstinate, that both within the walls of Jerusalem, and without in the neighbouring country, the whole land was one continued scene of horror and desolation; and had the siege continued much longer, the whole nation of the Jews had been totally destroyed, according to our Lord’s prediction. “But,” added our blessed Saviour, “for the elect’s sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days.” By the elect, are meant such of the Jews as had embraced the doctrines of the gospel, and particularly those who were brought in with the believing Gentiles.

As it is natural, in time of trouble, to look with eager expectation for a deliverer, our blessed Saviour cautioned his disciples not to listen to any pretences of that kind, as many false Christs would arise, and deceive

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

great numbers of the people. A prediction that was fully accomplished during the terrible siege of Jerusalem by the Romans: so Josephus tells us, that many arose, pretending to be the Messiah, boasting that they would deliver the nation from all its enemies. And the multitude, always too prone to listen to deceivers, who promise temporal advantages, giving credit to those deceivers, became more obstinate in their opposition to the Romans, and thereby rendered their destruction more severe and inevitable.

And what still increased the infatuation of the people, was their performing wonderful things during the war; and accordingly Josephus calls them magicians and sorcerers. Hence we see the propriety of the caution given by the Son of God, who foretold that "they should show great signs and wonders, inasmuch that, if it were possible, they would deceive the very elect. But take heed; behold, I have foretold you all things."

And as the partisans of the false Christs might pretend that the Messiah was concealed awhile for fear of the Romans, and the weaker sort of Christians, without this warning, have imagined that Christ was actually returned to deliver the nation in its extremity, and to

punish their enemies, who now so cruelly oppressed them, and that he would show himself as soon as it was proper, the blessed Jesus thought proper to caution them against this particular: "Wherefore, if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be."—*Matt.* xxiv. 26, &c.

The coming of the Son of man shall be like lightning, swift and destructive. But he will come, not personally; his servants only shall come, the Roman armies, who, by his command, shall destroy this nation, as eagles devour their prey.

Having thus given them a particular account of the various circumstances which should precede the destruction of Jerusalem, he next described that catastrophe itself, in all the pomp of language and imagery made use of by the ancient prophets when they foretold the destruction of cities and kingdoms. "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light; and the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken."—*Mark* xiii. 24, 25. "And upon the earth

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

distress of nations, with perplexity : the sea and the waves roaring ; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on earth."—*Luke* xxi. 25, &c.

By these lofty and figurative expressions, the decaying of all the glory, excellence, and prosperity of the nation, and the introduction of universal sadness, misery, and confusion, are beautifully described. The roaring of the sea and the waves, may justly be considered as metaphorical ; as the signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars, are plainly so ; and by the powers of heaven are meant the whole Jewish polity, government, laws, and religion, which were the work of heaven : these, our Lord tells us, shall be shaken, or rather dissolved.

As the disciples had, in conformity to the repeated questions of the Pharisees during his ministry, asked what should be the sign of his coming ? our blessed Saviour told them, that after the tribulation of those days, when the sun should be darkened, and all the enemies of the Messiah should mourn, they should see the accomplishment of what Daniel foretold, by the figurative expression of the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, for they should behold the signal

punishment executed on the Jewish nation by the Roman armies sent for that purpose, and by the decree and permission of heaven. "Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven : and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn ; and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory."—*Matt.* xxiv. 30.

Then were the followers of Christ to be delivered from the oppression under which they had long groaned, and openly honoured before the whole earth : and on this may true believers rest ; because it is founded on eternal truth. "Verily, I say unto you, This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."—*Matt.* xxiv. 34, 35.

Whoever shall compare the prediction of our Saviour with the history Josephus wrote of the war, cannot fail of being struck with the wisdom of Christ, and acknowledging that his prediction was truly divine : for as the Jewish nation was at this time in the most flourishing state, the event here foretold appeared altogether improbable. Besides, the circumstances of the destruction are very numerous, and surprisingly great ; and the whole delivered without any ambiguity. It is, therefore, a prophecy of such

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

a kind, as could never have been uttered by an impostor, and, consequently the person who delivered it was acquainted with the secret counsels of heaven, and was truly divine.

Many cavillers against the Christian religion have asked, why Christ should order his disciples not to flee from Jerusalem till they saw it encompassed with the Roman army, when it would then be impossible for them to make their escape? But persons, before they propose such questions, would do well to read attentively the history Josephus has given us of these terrible calamities; because they would there find a solution of the difficulty. That historian tells us, that Cestus Gallus surrounded the city with his army, and, at a time when he could easily have taken the city, suddenly withdrew his forces without any apparent reason. He adds, that as soon as the siege was raised, many eminent persons fled from it, as from a sinking ship. In all probability many of these were Christians, who, being warned by this prophecy of their great Master, saved themselves by flight, as he had directed. Thus we see what frivolous objections are made by the freethinkers of our age against the truth of the Sacred writings, and how easily they are answered.

Having thus beautifully, but awfully, described this important and striking event, the blessed Jesus assured his disciples that it would be very unexpected; and thence urged the necessity of a watchful vigilance, lest they should be surprised, and have a share in those calamities. “But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.”—*Matt.* xxiv. 37. “Watch ye, therefore, (for ye know not when the master of the house cometh; at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning;) lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping.”—*Mark* xiii. 35, 36.

It was natural, as men were to undergo at the destruction of Jerusalem nearly the same miseries, and as the passions which its approach would raise in their minds were similar to those which will happen at the destruction of the world, and the general judgment; it was natural, I say, for our blessed Saviour, on this occasion, to put his disciples in mind of that judgment, and to exhort them to the faithful discharge of their duty, from the consideration of the suddenness of his coming to call every individual to account after death: “Therefore, be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh. Who then is a faithful and wise servant.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, that he shall make him ruler over his whole goods."

—*Matt. xxiv. 44, &c.* As if he had said, you, who are ministers of religion, ought to be particularly attentive in discharging the important trust committed to your care; you are the stewards to whom is entrusted the whole household of the church: and you would do well to remember, that your example will have a great effect upon the minds of those employed under you. It is your duty to be well acquainted with the stores of evangelical truths, and to understand how they may be applied to the best advantage; you should be also careful to know the characters of the different persons under your directions, that you may be able to give every one of them his portion of meat in due season: and if I find you thus employed at my coming, I will reward you with the joys of my kingdom, even as an earthly master bestows particular marks of respect on such servants as have been remarkably faithful in any important trust.

But, on the other hand, if you are not true to the trust reposed in

you; if you pervert your office, and watch not over the souls committed to your care; I will come to you, unexpectedly, and make you dreadful examples of mine anger, by the severe punishments which I will inflict upon you. "But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping, and gnashing of teeth."—*Matt. xxiv. 48, &c.*

Having thus generally described the future state of retribution, our Lord passed to the consideration of the general judgment, when those rewards and punishments should be distributed in their utmost extent. This could not fail of animating his disciples to a vigorous discharge of their duty; and, by the striking representation of the last judgment he has here given, must greatly tend to rouse the consciences of men from their lethargy, and consider, before it be too late, "the things which belong to their peace."

Then shall the kingdom of heaven, the gospel kingdom, in the last dispensation of it, when the king-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

dom of grace is going to be swallowed up in the kingdom of glory, "Be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish." They that were foolish took their lamps, but put no oil in their vessels; while the wise, as an instance of their prudence and foresight, took both their lamps, and oil in their vessels; knowing that it was uncertain when the bridegroom would arrive, and that they might in all probability wait long for his coming. Nor were they mistaken: for the bridegroom did not come so soon as they expected. "And while he tarried, they all slumbered and slept: and at midnight there was a great cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps: and the foolish said unto the wise, give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you; but go you rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterwards came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to

us. But he answered, and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch, therefore; for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." —*Matt.* xxv. 6, 7, &c.

In order to understand this parable, we must remember that it alludes to the custom of the eastern people. It was usual with them for the bridegroom to bring his bride home in the evening, sooner or later, as circumstances might happen; and, that they might be received properly at his house, his female acquaintance, especially those of the younger sort, were invited to come and wait with lamps, till some of his retinue, despatched before the rest, informed them that he was near at hand; upon which they trimmed their lamps, went forth to welcome him, and conduct him, with his bride, into the house; for which they were honoured as guests at the marriage feast, and shared in the usual festivities.

To ten such virgins our blessed Saviour compares those to whom the gospel is preached; because this was the general number appointed to wait on the bridegroom, and to these all Christian professors may be likened, who, taking their lamp of Christian profession, go forth to meet the bridegroom, that is, consider themselves as can-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

didates for the kingdom of heaven, and desire to be admitted with Christ, the celestial bridegroom, into the happy mansions of immortality.

We must remember, that there always was, and always will be, a mixture of good and bad in the church, till the great day of separation arrives. The weakness of the foolish is represented by their taking no oil in their vessels, with their lamps; that is, the foolish professors content themselves with the bare lamp of a profession, and never think of furnishing it with the oil of divine grace, the fruit of which is a life of holiness. Whereas, the wise, well knowing that a lamp without the supply of oil would be speedily extinguished; that faith without love or holiness will be of no consequence; take care to secure a supply for themselves of the divine grace, and to display in their lives the works of love and charity. While all those virgins, though differently supplied, waiting the coming of the bridegroom, all slumbered and slept; that is, as some think, all Christians, both good and bad, the sincere and the hypocritical, lie down together in the sleep of death, and while the bridegroom delays his coming, slumber in the chambers of the dust. But others suppose, that this argues the want of vigi-

lance and care, even in the wise as well as the foolish; that few if any are so attentive as they ought to be to the coming of their Lord.

The Jews have a tradition, that Christ's coming to judgment will be at midnight; which agrees with that particular in the parable, "At midnight there was a cry made, Go ye out to meet him." But, however this be, whether he will come at midnight, or in the morning, it will be awfully sudden and alarming. The great cry will be heard to the ends of the earth; the trumpet shall sound, and the mighty archangel's voice pierce even the bowels of the earth, and the depths of the ocean: "Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him."

The graves, both earthly and watery, must surrender their clayey tenants, and all will then begin to think how they may prepare themselves to find admittance to the marriage supper of the Lamb. "Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps." But the foolish soon perceived their folly; their lamps were gone out, totally extinguished, and they had no oil to support the flame: in like manner the hypocrite's hope shall perish. But the wise were in a much happier condition; they had oil in their vessels sufficient for themselves, but none to spare for, when the foolish

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

virgins would have procured some from them, they denied their request, fearing there would not be enough for both.

There are here beautifully represented, nominal and sincere Christians. The former, having only the bare lamp of a profession, and who have not been solicitous to gain the oil of divine grace, by a constant use of the means assigned, will fare like the foolish virgins; while the latter, whose hearts are filled with divine oil, will, like the wise virgins, enter into the joy of their Lord.

But the foolish, going to purchase oil, missed the bridegroom, and, behold, "the door was shut." They at last, however, reached the gate, and with great importunity cried, "Lord, Lord, open unto us." But he answered and said, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not." As you denied me on earth, I deny you now: Depart from me; I know you not! How justly, therefore, did our blessed Saviour bid us all watch, that we may be found ready whenever he cometh; or commands, by the king of terrors, our attendance before his judgment-seat. Let us not refuse this kind invitation of being constantly prepared to meet the heavenly Bridegroom; let us get our lamps filled with oil, that we may be ready to follow our

great Master into the happy mansions of the heavenly Canaan.

But as this duty was of the utmost importance, our blessed Saviour, to show us more clearly the nature and use of Christian watchfulness, to which he exhorts us at the conclusion of the parable of the ten virgins, added another, wherein he represented the different characters of a faithful and slothful servant, and the difference of their future acceptance.

This parable, like the former, is intended to stir us up to a zealous preparation for the coming of our Lord, by diligence in the discharge of our duty, and by a careful improvement of our souls in holiness; and at the same time to expose the vain pretences of hypocrites, and to demonstrate that their fair speeches and outward forms, without the power of godliness, will be of no service whatever in the last day of account.

The Son of man, said he, may, with respect to his final coming to judge the world, be likened unto "A man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability: and straightway took his journey."—*Matt. xxv. 14, 15.*

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Immediately on his master's departure, he that had received the five talents lost no time, but went and traded with the same, and his increase was equal to his industry and application; he made them other five talents. He that had received two talents did the same, and had equal success. But he that received one, very unlike the conduct of his fellow-servants, went his way, and digged in the earth and hid his lord's money, idle, useless, unemployed, and unimproved!

After a long time, and at an hour when they did not expect it, the lord of those servants returned, called them before him, and ordered them to give an account of their several trusts. Upon which, he that had received five talents, as a proof of his fidelity, produced other five talents, saying, "Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained besides them five talents more."—*Matt.* xxv. 20. His lord, highly applauding his industry and fidelity, said to him, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord."—*Matt.* xxv. 21.

In like manner also he that had received two talents declared he had gained two other; upon which he was honoured with the same ap-

plause, and admitted into the same joy with his fellow-servant: their master having regard to the industry and fidelity of his servants; not to the number of the talents only, but the greatness of their increase.

After this, he that had received the one talent came, and, with a shameful falsehood, to excuse his vile indolence, said, "Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine."—*Matt.* xxv. 24, 25.

The perversion of even the smallest portion of grace greatly excited the resentment of his lord, who answered, "Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed; thou oughtest, therefore, to have put my money to the exchangers, and then, at my coming, I should have received mine own with usury. Take, therefore, the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

weeping, and gnashing of teeth.”
—*Matt.* xxv. 26, &c.

Such is the parable of the talents, as delivered by our blessed Saviour; a parable containing the measures of our duty to God, and the motives that enforce it, all delivered in the plainest and simplest manner. But its views are so extensive and affecting, that while it instructs the meanest capacity, it engages reverence and attention from the greatest, and strikes an impression on the most improved understanding. We are to consider God as our Lord and Master, the author and giver of every good gift, and ourselves as his servants or stewards, who, in various instances and measures, have received from his goodness such blessings and abilities, as may fit us for the several stations and offices of life to which his providence appoints us. But then we are to observe, that these are committed to us as a trust or loan, for whose due management we are accountable to the donor.

If we faithfully acquit ourselves of this probationary charge, we shall receive far greater instances of God's regard and favour; but if we are remiss and negligent, we must expect to feel his resentment and displeasure.

A time will come, and how near it may be none of us can tell, when

our great Master will demand a particular account of every talent he hath committed to our care. This time may, indeed, be at a distance; for it is uncertain when the king of terrors will receive the awful warrant to terminate our existence here below: yet it will certainly come, and our eternal happiness or misery depends upon it; so that we should have it continually in our thoughts, and engraven, as with the point of a diamond, on the tables of our hearts.

We learn, from this instructive parable, that infinite Wisdom hath entrusted men with different talents, and adjusted them to the various purposes of human life. But though the gifts of men are unequal, none can with justice complain; since whatever is bestowed, be it more or less, is a favour entirely unmerited.

Each then should be thankful, and satisfied with his portion; and, instead of envying the more liberal endowments of others, apply himself to the improvement of his own. And it should be attentively observed, that the difficulty of the task is in proportion to the number of talents committed to each. He who had received five was to gain other five; and he who had received two, was to account for other two.

Surely then we have no reason to

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

complain if our Master has laid on us a lighter burden, a more easy and less service, than what he has on others. Especially as our interest in the favour of the Almighty does not depend on the number of our talents, but on our diligence and application in the management of them: so that the moral design of this parable is, to engage our utmost attention to improve such talents as our heavenly Father has thought proper to bestow upon us.

By these talents are principally meant, the communication and graces of the Holy Spirit, which God bestows in different measures, "dividing to every man severally as he will." And subordinate to these are all the means, opportunities, and abilities, which men have to exercise or improve their graces; all the advantages of station, fortune, education, and whatever may enable us to do good; for we, having received all we enjoy from God, are strictly obliged to promote the wise ends for which he bestows his favours. And here let us take a short and imperfect view of what God has done for us. He has given us reason and understanding to discern good from evil, and inquire into the causes, relations, and consequences of things, to collect from them proper rules of judgment and action. Indeed since the fall this faculty

has been much obscured; but still it remains an universal gift of God to men, and though not equal in all, yet it is given to every man in such measure as is sufficient for his direction. In the knowledge of our duty, and the pursuit of our happiness, God has, by the gospel, so graciously supplied the defect of reason, that the weakest understanding, enlightened by grace, may know how to be happy; such assistances of divine grace attend every Christian, if he will apply to God for them, as may enable him to direct his inclinations, govern his passions, and subdue his corrupt affections. These talents are in some degree common to all men; and by the improvement of that grace which is conferred on every one, all may have sufficient to conduct them through the several stages of life, if they will use but proper diligence and application. But regard must be had to all the means for cultivating those gifts of nature and grace, such as all opportunities of instruction, the ministry and ordinances of religion, the reproofs and examples of good men, the occasions offered and the abilities given for the exercise of religion. All these are talents, or gifts of God, deposited with us to be diligently made use of, and for which we are accountable to him.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

We shall, therefore, proceed to show what duty is required from us, in the improvement of these talents. It is here supposed that these talents are improvable, or otherwise they would be of no use or value; and, indeed, we are bound, by the command of God, who has threatened to inflict severe penalties if we neglect it, to improve them. And if they are not improved, they will not continue long with us, but be lost; the finest parts and capacities, without proper culture, will make but a mean and contemptible figure. No knowledge can be preserved without use and exercise, and the same holds with regard to moral accomplishments. It requires great care and attention to form a religious habit, but much more to preserve it in its vigour. Unless we co-operate with the motions of God's grace, and cultivate it by use and application, its impressions will gradually wear out, and be lost. "The Spirit of God will not always strive with man." He gives us a talent to manage, equal to the service he expects from us; but if we are slothful and negligent, and will not apply it to the purposes for which it is given, he will recal the useless gift. "Take from him," says he, "the talent, and give it to him that hath ten talents." Let us, therefore, dili-

gently improve every talent committed to us, because this will be required of us in the day of accounts. Happy the man who has improved his talents on earth! What this improvement implies, and how we may discharge this duty, is an inquiry of the nearest concern to us. The proper improvement of all God's gifts, is the employing them so as may best promote his glory.

This is the end the Almighty has proposed in our creation; in all the powers he hath endued us with, and in all the aids of grace he has vouchsafed us. Whatever other improvement we make of them will not profit us, nor be admitted as any proof of our fidelity, in the day of reckoning. We may cultivate our understanding by learning and study, and extend our knowledge through all the subjects of human inquiry; but if our end be only to gratify our curiosity or our vanity, we are not serving God, but ourselves: we may increase our portion of God's outward gifts: but if we only apply them to enlarge our own convenience, we are not making the improvements our Master expects: we may take pleasure in our knowledge and wealth, rejoice in them as our portion and instrument in our present situation; but we must still remem-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

ber, that in our reckoning with God all these improvements of our capacities and abilities will be added to our account. And the only use God will admit us to set in balance of our debt to him, is to employ them as means of increasing and multiplying our graces, or as instruments of exercising them in the work of piety and religion.

From hence we may infer, that there will be degrees of future glory and happiness, proportioned to our eminence in the divine life, and the service we have done to the cause of Christ.

Dreadful will be his case, who has squandered away the talent itself; suffered his gifts to perish for want of use; or, by abusing them to the service of sin, has provoked the Almighty to take them from him.

How shall the prodigal recal the property he has spent, and appease the anger of his Judge! The terrors of the Lord may justly affright him; but it should not extinguish his endeavours in despair. He has lost many excellent talents; but he who gave can restore. Indeed, the most circumspect person wants much to be forgiven; and must expect his reward from the mercy of his Judge, not from the merit of his service. Let us then do all in our power to bring forth

fruits meet for repentance. For though the awful day of the Lord may be at a great distance, yet the time allotted to us to prepare for it is limited by the short space of human life. The night of death cometh, when no man can work. To-day, therefore, while it is called to-day, let us be diligent in the work of the Lord, correct our errors, and put away all evil, and finish our course well, that we may obtain his approbation, and make our calling and election sure.

We shall now proceed to the third parable, or rather description, delivered at the same time by the blessed Jesus, namely, that of the last judgment. "When the Son of man," said he, "shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory. And before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.—*Matt. xxv. 31, &c.* It is common in the Old Testament, to compare good men to sheep, on account of their innocence and usefulness; and wicked men to goats, for their exorbitant lusts. Our blessed Saviour, however, does not pursue the allegory farther, but describes the remaining, and, indeed, the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

greatest part of this awful scene, in terms perfectly simple; so that though the sense be profound, it is obvious.

Here the judgment of all nations, Gentiles as well as Christians, is exhibited; and the particulars on which these awful trials are to proceed, displayed by the great Judge himself.

He we learn, that we shall be condemned or acquitted according as we have neglected or performed works of charity; works which flow from the great principles of faith and love, and which the very heathens are, by the light of reason and aid of grace, invited to perform. But we must not understand that such works merited this favour from the Judge; no, all who are acquitted at that day, whether heathens or Christians, shall be acquitted solely on account of the life and death of Christ, the true, the only meritorious cause.

Good men can at best but consider their present state as an absence from their native country. A state in which they are often exposed to innumerable temptations, to persecutions, to poverty, to reproach, to contempt. But a proper consideration, that they are travelling towards the heavenly Jerusalem, a city prepared for them when the foundations of the world were laid,

will be abundantly sufficient to support their spirits, and render them "more than conquerors." The glory laid up for them in the mansions of eternity, and which the great Judge will, at the awful day of accounts, confer upon them, will animate them to bear the violence of their oppressors, and even defy the malice of men and devils. Nay, they will behold without envy the flourishing prosperity of the wicked, and look forward to that glorious and immortal crown which will be given to the righteous by their great Redeemer. "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was cast in prison, and ye came unto me."—*Matt.* xxv. 34, &c.

These enraptured and amazed souls shall then ask, with great reverence and humility, when they performed these services? as they never saw him in want, and therefore could not assist him. "Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

clothed thee? or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer, and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, In as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” —*Matt. xxv. 37, &c.* This is truly astonishing! The united wisdom of men and angels could never have discovered a more proper method to convey an idea of the warmth and force of the divine benevolence to the sons of men, or offer a more forcible motive to charity, than that the Son of God should, from his seat of judgment, in presence of the whole race of mankind, and all the hosts of the blessed spirits from the courts of heaven, declare that all good offices done to the afflicted for his sake, are done to himself.

During the time of his dwelling with human nature in this vale of tears, he suffered unspeakable injuries and afflictions; and, therefore, he considers all the righteous who are distressed as members of his body, loves them with the utmost tenderness, and is so greatly interested in their welfare, that he rejoices when they are happy, and, humanly speaking, grieves when they are distressed.

Perhaps the true reason why the grand inquiry shall rest solely on the performance of duties, is, that men,

generally speaking, consider the neglect of duties as a matter of no great consequence, but dread the commission of crimes. And hence it happens, that while they keep themselves free from the latter, they easily find excuses for the former. And as there is not a more pernicious error, with regard to religion and morality than this, the blessed Jesus thought proper to give such an account of the judgment as should prove the most solemn caution against it.

But, as the inquiry turns wholly on the performance of the duties of charity, it has been asked, why these duties only are mentioned, and no notice taken of the duties of piety? though the Judge himself, upon another occasion, declared these to be of more importance than the duties of charity, so highly applauded in this description of the last day. But those who ask this question would do well to remember, that piety and Christian charity cannot subsist separately: piety, and its origin, faith, always producing charity; and charity, wherever it subsist, necessarily presupposing piety.

The connexion between piety and genuine charity will evidently appear, if it be considered, that no man can be truly benevolent and merciful without loving those dis-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

positions. Consequently, he must love benevolence in God, that is, he must love God; for piety, or the love of God, is nothing else but the regard we cherish towards God, on account of his benefits and perfections.

Piety and charity being thus essentially connected together, it is abundantly sufficient to examine the conduct of men with regard to either of those graces. In the above description, the inquiry is represented as turning upon the duties of charity, perhaps because in this branch of goodness there is less room for self-deceit than in the other. It is common for hypocrites, by a pretended zeal in the externals of religion, to make specious pretences to extraordinary piety, and at the same time are totally deficient in charity; are covetous, unjust, rapacious, and proud, and consequently destitute of all love to their Creator. But none can assume the appearance of charity, but by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, relieving the distressed, and performing other benevolent offices to their brethren.

The works of charity in almsgiving may indeed, in some particular cases, flow from other principles than those of pious and benevolent dispositions, as from vanity, or even views of interest; but then it should be remembered, that a

common degree of hypocrisy will hardly engage men to undertake them; they are by far too weighty duties to be sustained by those false principles, and therefore are seldom counterfeited. Consequently, wherever a genuine, extensive, and permanent charity is found, we may hope that there the love of God reigns in reality.

Hence we learn, that all pretences to goodness, without a principle of grace wrought in the heart, avails nothing in point of eternal salvation. At the same time, if we consider it in its full light, it will give us no reason to think well of ourselves, if we are wanting in our duty to God; and that we should not only be charitable, but grateful also, just, temperate, and blameless in all our dealings with mankind. For we should remember, that the duty we owe to the Almighty is no way inconsistent with what is due to men, and which it would be unjust in us to neglect. It consists in dispositions and actions, the same in kind, but different in degree, proportionate to the perfection of the object.

He who from right motives loves and admires holiness, justice, and truth, in men, cannot but love those perfections in God, that is, he must love God; so, likewise, he that is truly grateful from a right principle, to any earthly benefactor, cannot be

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

ungrateful to one from whose bounty he receives all the good things he enjoys: and since ingratitude in men is nothing more than forgetting the benefit received and the benefactor who conferred the favour, how can we acquit ourselves from the charge of ingratitude to God, if we forget the obligations we lie under to him, and are at no pains to return him thanks; that is, if we wholly neglect the external and internal exercises of devotion.

Since, therefore, the duty we owe to God is the same in kind with that we owe to man, where there is any resemblance of circumstances, it will undeniably follow, that true morality can never exist where piety is wanting; and that those who pretend to morality, and are destitute of piety, render themselves ridiculous.

The awful Judge himself has told us, that after he has passed the happy sentence on the righteous, he will pronounce the following sentence of condemnation upon the wicked: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then

shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, In as much as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me."—*Matt. xxv. 41, &c.*

It is remarkable, that our blessed Saviour has told us that the fire of hell was not prepared for the wicked, but for the devil and his angels: but that the kingdom of heaven was prepared for the righteous. Perhaps he intended to teach us, that the original design of Omnipotence was to render man happy, not miserable: a state of consummate felicity was formed for the human race, at the time they were created; but the fire of hell was prepared for the devil and his angels immediately after their fall. And as wicked men join with devils in their sin of rebellion against the Almighty, they are doomed to share with them in their punishment; a punishment of the heaviest kind, a punishment of devils.

After having represented the sentences that are to be passed on the righteous and the wicked, our Saviour closed the parable in the following manner: "And these shall go away into everlasting punish-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

ment: but the righteous into life eternal."—*Matt.* xxv. 46.

Let us now behold, with an attentive eye and a solicitous heart, "the end of all the living;" that awful scene, in which the various dispensations of God to mankind shall terminate in the solemn day, "when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and sit on his" magnificent "throne." All nations and peoples shall be assembled before him, and we must make a part of that assembly. The "sheep" and the "goats" must then be "separated:" and O, my soul, amongst which wilt thou then be numbered? Is there an inquiry, is there a care of greater, of equal, of comparable importance?

CHAPTER XXXI.

Our blessed Lord is anointed by a poor, but pious Woman—The perfidious Judas consents to betray his Master—The humble Jesus washes the Feet of his Disciples, and foretels that Disciple who was to betray him into the Hands of his inveterate Enemies.

THE blessed Jesus used frequently to retire in the evening from the city to the Mount of Olives, and there spend the night, either in some village or the gardens; either to avoid falling into the hands of his enemies or for the sake of a little retirement. They did not,

indeed, presume to attack him while he was surrounded by his followers, in the day-time; but, in all probability, had he lodged within the city, they would have apprehended him during the darkness and silence of the night. When our blessed Saviour had finished these parables, he added a short account of his own death, in order to fortify his disciples against a greater trial than they had yet met with; namely, the sufferings of their Master. "And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said unto his disciples, Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified. Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high-priest, who was called Caiaphas. And consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him. But they said, Not on the feast-day, least there be an uproar among the people."—*Matt.* xxvi. 1, &c.

When the evening approached, our blessed Saviour, with his disciples, repaired to Bethany, and entered the house of Simon the leper, probably one who experienced the healing efficacy of his power. But while he sat at meat, a woman, who had also, doubtless, been an object

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

of his mercy, poured a box of precious ointment upon his head.

This action displeased his disciples, who knew that their Master was not delighted with luxuries of any kind; and, therefore, they rebuked the woman, imagining that it would have been more acceptable to the Son of God, if the ointment had been sold, and the money distributed among the sons and daughters of poverty and affliction.

To reprove the disciples, Jesus told them that it had pleased the divine providence to order that there should always be persons in necessitous circumstances, that the righteous might never want occasions for exercising their charity; but that those who did not now testify their love to him, would never more have the opportunity of doing it, as the time of his ministry was near its period, when the king of terrors should enjoy a short triumph over his body; and, therefore, this woman had seasonably anointed him for his burial. And to make them sensible of their folly in blaming the woman for this her expression of love to him, he assured them that she should be highly esteemed for this action in every part of the world, and her memory live to the latest period of time.

Judas Iscariot (one of the twelve, having been more forward than the

rest in condemning the woman, thought the rebuke was particularly directed to him), stung with the guilt of his own conscience, arose from the table, and went immediately into the city, to the high-priest's palace, where he found the whole council assembled. His passion would not suffer him to reflect on the horrid deed he was going to commit: he immediately promised, for the reward of thirty pieces of silver, to betray into their hands his Lord and Master.

Having thus engaged with the rulers of Israel to put into their hands a person who had been long labouring for their salvation, who had often invited them, in the most pathetic manner, to embrace the benevolent terms of the gospel offered by the Almighty, he sought an opportunity to betray him in the absence of the multitude.

Our Lord, who well knew that the time of his suffering drew nigh, desired, therefore, to celebrate the passover with his disciples. He was now going to finish the mighty work for which he came into the world; and therefore would not neglect to fulfil the smallest particular of the law of Moses. He therefore sent two of his disciples into the city to prepare a lamb, and make it ready, for eating the passover; telling them that they should

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

meet a man bearing a pitcher of water, who would conduct them to his house, and show them a large upper room furnished, where they were to make ready for him. He was willing, in this last transaction, to convince his disciples that he knew everything that should befall him; that his sufferings were all foretold by the Almighty; and that they were all, on his own account, submitted unto voluntarily.

When night approached, Jesus left Bethany; and everything being ready for him at the time he entered into the city, he sat down at the appointed hour. But, knowing that his sufferings were now near, he told his disciples, in the most affectionate manner, that he had greatly longed to eat the passover with them before he suffered, in order to show them the strongest proofs of his love. These proofs were, to give them a pattern of humility and love, by washing their feet; instructing them in the nature of his death, and a propitiary sacrifice; instituting the sacrament in commemoration of his sufferings; comforting them by the tender discourses recorded, *John* xiv. xv. xvi., in which he gave them a variety of excellent directions, together with many gracious promises; and recommending them to the kind protection of his heavenly Father. "With desire I

have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer. For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

Having thus spoken, he arose from the table, laid aside his garments like a servant, and with all the officiousness of a humble minister, washed the feet of his disciples, without distinction, though one of them, Judas Iscariot, was a monster of impiety; that they might at once behold a conjunction of love and humility, of self-denial and indifference, represented by a person glorious beyond expression, their great Lord and Master.

He washed their feet (according to a custom which prevailed in those hot countries both before and after meat), in order to show them an example of the utmost humility and condescension.

The omnipotent Son of the Father lays every thing aside, that he may serve his followers; heaven stoops to earth, one abyss calls upon another, and the miseries of man, which were almost infinite, are exceeded by a mercy equal to the immensity of the Almighty. He deferred this ceremony, which was a customary civility paid to honourable strangers at the beginning of their feast, that it might be preparatory to the second, which he intended should be

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

a feast to the whole world, when all the followers of the blessed Jesus should have an opportunity in a spiritual manner, of feeding on his flesh, and drinking his blood.

When our blessed Saviour came to Peter, he modestly declined it; but his Master told him, if he refused to submit implicitly to all his orders he could have no part with him. On which Peter cried out, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." But Jesus told him that the person who was washed had no reason to wash any part of the body except his feet, which he might have dirtied by walking from the bath. And added, Ye are all clean as to the outward laver, but not as to the inward and spiritual laver; I well know that one of you will betray me.

When our gracious Lord had finished this menial service, he asked his disciples if they knew the meaning of what he had done, as the action was purely emblematical? You truly, added he, style me Master and Lord, for I am the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. But if I, your Master and your Lord, have condescended to wash your feet, you surely ought to perform, with the utmost pleasure, the humblest offices of love one to another. I have set you a pattern

of humility, and I recommend it to you.

And certainly nothing can more effectually show us the necessity of this heavenly temper of mind, than its being recommended to us by so great an example; a recommendation which, in the present circumstances, was particularly seasonable; for the disciples having heard their great Master declare that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, their minds were filled with ambitious thoughts. And, therefore, our blessed Saviour added, Ye need not be ashamed to follow my example in this particular; for no servant can think it beneath him to condescend to perform those actions his Lord had done before him. And, therefore, if he knows his duty, he will be happy if he practices it. He, moreover, added, that though he had called them all to the apostleship, and well knew the secret dispositions of every heart before he chose them, they need not be surprised that one among them should prove a traitor, as thereby the Scripture would be fulfilled, "He that eateth bread with me, hath lift up his heel against me."

As our blessed Saviour was now to be but a short time with his disciples, he thought proper to take his farewell of them, which he did in a most affectionate manner.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

These melancholy tidings greatly troubled them. They were unwilling to part with so kind a friend, so dear a master, so wise a guide, and so profitable a teacher; especially as they thought they should be left in a forlorn condition, a poor and helpless prey to the rage and hatred of a blind and malicious generation. They seem willing to die with their Lord, if that might be accepted. Why cannot I follow thee? I will lay down my life for thee! was the language of one, and even all of them; but they could not support the thoughts of a disconsolate separation.

Their great and compassionate Master, seeing them thus dejected, endeavoured to cheer their drooping spirits: "Let not your hearts be troubled." Listen attentively to what I am going to deliver for your consolation: "I am going to prepare a place for you; I will come again, and receive you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also." A reviving word of promise. They were one day to meet again their dear, their affectionate Master, in a place where they should live together to eternity.

But death makes so vast a distance between friends, and the disciples then knew so little of a future state, that they seemed to doubt whether they should, after

their parting, meet their great Redeemer. They neither knew the place where he was going, nor the way that led to his kingdom: "Lord," said they, "as we know not whither thou goest, how can we know the way?" In answer to this question, he told them that he was "the way, the truth, and the life:" as if he had said, Through the propitiatory sacrifice I am about to offer, the sacred truths I have delivered, and the divine assistance which I shall hereafter dispense, you are to obtain that happiness which I go to prepare for you.

But, lest all these arguments should not be sufficient to quiet their minds, he had still another, which could not fail of success: "If you love me," says he, "you will rejoice because I said, I go to the Father." Intimating, that he would consider it as a proof of their love to him, if they ceased to mourn. They, doubtless, thought that by grieving for his death they expressed their love to their Master; and it might seem strange that our Saviour should put so contrary an interpretation on their friendly sorrow, or require so unnatural a thing of them as to rejoice at his departure. What! (might they think), shall we rejoice at so amiable a friend's removal from us? or can we be glad that he retires, and leaves us in

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

this vale of misery? No, it is impossible; the human heart, on so malancholy an occasion, can have no disposition to rejoice.

Our blessed Saviour, therefore, adds this reason to solve the seeming paradox; "because he was going to his Father:" that is, he was going to ascend to the right hand of infinite Power, from whence he would send them all the assistance they could desire. It must not, however, be supposed, that he meant by these words, that his disciples should not be concerned at his death, or that they could not love him unless they expressed a visible joy on this occasion. That would, indeed, have been a hard interpretation of their grief: he knew their grief flowed from love; and that if their love had not been strong, their sorrow had been much less. Indeed, their Master was fully convinced that love was the occasion of their sorrow; and therefore he used these arguments to mitigate it, and direct it in a proper course.

Nor did our Lord intend to intimate that all sorrow for so worthy a friend was unlawful, or an unbecoming expression of their love: doubtless he was not displeased to see his disciples so tenderly affected at his removal from them. He who shed tears at the grave of Lazarus, blended with sighs and groans,

cannot be thought to forbid them wholly at his own. He therefore did not chide his disciples with angry reproaches, as though they had been entirely in the wrong but gently reasoned with them by kind persuasions: "Let not your hearts be troubled;" as rather pitying than condemning their sorrow.

Soon after Jesus had spoken these things, his heart was greatly troubled to think that one of his disciples should prove his enemy: he complained of it at the table, declaring that one of them should betray him. This moving declaration greatly affected the disciples; and they began every one of them to say to their Master, "Lord, is it I?" But Jesus, giving them no decisive answer, John, the beloved disciple, whose sweet disposition and other amiable qualities is perpetuated in the peculiar love his great Master bore him, and was now reclining on his bosom, asked him, who among the disciples could be guilty of so detestable a crime? Jesus told him, that the person to whom he should give the sop, when he had dipped it, was he who should betray him. Accordingly, as soon as he had dipped the sop in the dish he gave it to Judas Iscariot, saying to him at the same time, "That thou doest, do quickly."

Judas received the sop, without

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

knowing anything of what his Master had told the beloved disciple : nor did any of the disciples except St. John entertain the least suspicion that Judas was the person who would betray their Master.

The innocent disciples were indeed so deeply affected with his declaration that one of them should betray him, that they did not remark the words of Jesus to his apostate disciple, but continued to ask him who was the person that should be guilty of so base a crime? Willing, at last, to satisfy their importunity, the blessed Jesus declared that the person who dipped his hand with him in the dish should betray him. This to the eleven was a joyful declaration, but confounding in the highest degree to Judas. Impudent as he was, it struck him speechless, pointing him out plainly and displaying the foulness of his heart.

While Judas continued mute with confusion, the blessed Jesus declared that his death should be brought about according to the decrees of Heaven, though that would not in the least mitigate the crime of the person who betrayed him ; adding, "it had been good for that man if he had not been born." Judas having now recovered himself a little, asserted his innocence by a question which implied a denial of

the charge. But his Master soon silenced him, by positively affirming that he was really the person.

As various conjectures have been formed concerning the motives which induced the perfidious Judas cruelly to deliver up his innocent Master into the hands of his enemies, it may not be improper to cite those which appear to be most probable, though the decision must be entirely left to the reader.

Some are of opinion that he was induced to commit this villainy by his resentment of the rebuke given him by his Master, for blaming the woman who came with the precious ointment, and anointed the head of Jesus as he sat at meat in the house of Simon the leper. But though this had, doubtless, its weight with the traitor, yet it could not, I think, be his only motive ; because the rebuke was given in general to all the disciples, who had certainly been forward with him in censuring the woman. Nor can we imagine, even if he had been rebuked alone, that so mild a reproof could provoke any person, however wicked, to the horrid act of murdering his friend ; much less Judas, whose covetous disposition must have disposed him to bear everything from his Master, from whom he expected the highest preferment, if he should openly declare himself the Messiah, and take the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

reins of government into his own hands.

Others think that Judas betrayed his Master through covetousness. But if we understand by covetousness the reward given by the priests, this opinion is equally defective; for the sum was too small for the most sordid wretch to think equivalent to the life of a friend, especially when he expected from him the highest posts and advantages.

Others attribute the perfidy of Judas to his doubting whether his Master was the Messiah; and that he betrayed him in a fit of despair. But of all the solutions, this is the worst founded. For if Judas believed his Master to be an impostor, he must have observed something in his behaviour which led him to form such an opinion of him; and in that case he would doubtless have mentioned it to the chief priests and elders, when he made the contract with them; which it is plain he did not, as they would have reminded him of it when he came back and expressed his remorse for what he had done. It should also be observed, that had Judas given them any intimations of this kind, they would doubtless have urged them against our blessed Saviour himself, in the course of his trial, when they were at so great a loss for witnesses to support their accu-

sation; and against the apostles, afterwards, when they reproved them for speaking in the name of Jesus. Besides, had Judas thought his Master an impostor, and proposed nothing by his treachery but the price he put upon his life, how came he to sell him for such a trifle, when he well knew that the chief priests and rulers would have given him any sum, rather than not have got him into their hands?

In fine, the supposition that Judas believed his Master to be an impostor, is directly confuted by the solemn declaration he made to the priests, when he declared the deepest conviction of the innocence of our great Redeemer: "I have sinned," says he, "in betraying the innocent blood."

It must be remembered, that the remorse he felt for this crime, when he saw his Master condemned, was too bitter to be endured; so that he fled even to the king of terrors for relief.

The evangelist St. John tells us, that he was of so covetous a disposition as to steal money out of our Lord's bag; and hence we have sufficient reason to believe that he first followed Jesus with a view of obtaining riches, and other temporal advantages, which he expected the Messiah's friends would enjoy. It likewise authorises us to think, that

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

as he had hitherto reaped none of these advantages, he might grow impatient under the delay; and the rather, as Jesus had lately discouraged all ambitious views among his disciples, and neglected to embrace the opportunity of erecting that kingdom which was offered him by the multitude, who accompanied him into Jerusalem with shouts, and crying, Hosannah to the Son of David! His impatience, therefore, becoming excessive, suggested to him the thought of delivering his Master into the hands of the council, firmly persuaded that he would then be obliged to assume the dignity of the Messiah, and consequently be able to reward his followers. For as this court was composed of the chief priests, elders, and scribes, that is, the principal persons of the sacerdotal order, the representatives of the great families, and the doctors of the law; the traitor did not doubt that his Master, when brought before so august an assembly, would assert his pretensions to the title of Messiah, prove his claim to their full conviction, gain them over to his interest, and immediately enter on his regal dignity. And though he must be sensible that the measures he took to compass his intention were very offensive to his Master, yet he might think the success of it would procure

his pardon from so compassionate a Master, and even recommend him to favour. In the mean time, his project, however plausible it may appear to one of his turn, was far from being free from difficulty; and therefore, while he revolved it in his own mind, many things might occur to stagger his resolution. At length, thinking himself affronted by the rebuke of Jesus, at the time when the woman anointed the head of his Master, he was provoked to execute the resolution he had formed of obliging him to alter his measures. Rising, therefore, directly from the table, he went immediately into the city, to the palace of the high-priest, where he found the council assembled, consulting how they might take Jesus by subtilty in the absence of the multitude.

To them he made known his intention of delivering his Master into their hands; and undertook, for a small sum of money, to conduct a band of armed men to the place where the Saviour of the world usually spent the night with his disciples, where they might apprehend him without the least danger of a tumult.

Some reasons may be offered in support of this opinion concerning the motives which induced Judas to betray his Master. First, from the nature of the contract; "What

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

will ye give me," said he, "and I will deliver him unto you?" He did not mean that he would deliver him up to be put to death; for though the priests had consulted among themselves, how they might destroy Jesus, they had not been so abominably wicked as to declare their intention publicly; they only proposed to bring him to trial for assuming the character of the Messiah, and to treat him as it should appear he deserved. The offer, therefore, which Judas made them, of delivering them up, was in conformity to their declared resolutions. Nor did they understand it in any other light; for had the priests thought that his design in this was to get his Master punished with death, they must also have thought he believed him to be an impostor; in which case they would, doubtless, have produced him as one of their principal evidences, no person being more proper. Also, when Judas returned to them with the money, declaring that he had sinned in betraying the innocent blood, instead of replying, "What is that to us? see thou to that;" it was the most natural thing in the world to have upbraided him with the stain he had put upon his Master's character, by the contract they had made with him.

It is true, they called the money

they gave him "the price of blood;" but they did not mean this in the strictest sense, as they had neither hired Jesus to assassinate his Master, nor can they be supposed to have charged themselves with the guilt of murdering him. It was only the price of blood, consequent upon being the reward they had given to the traitor, for putting it in their power to take away the life of Christ, under the colour and form of public justice. Now it may be doubted whether Judas asked the money as a reward of his service. He covetously, indeed, kept it; and the priests for that reason called it the price of blood.

In short, Judas knew that the rulers could not take away the life of any person whatsoever, the Romans having deprived them of that power; and therefore some think he could have no design of this kind in delivering him up; not to mention that it was a common opinion among the Jews, that the Messiah could never die: an opinion that Judas might easily embrace, having seen his Master raise several persons, and among the rest one who had been in the grave no less than four days.

Another reason which may be assigned in confirmation of this opinion is the traitor's hanging himself, when he found him condemned, not by the governor, but by the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

council, whose prerogative it was to judge prophets. Had Judas proposed to take away the life of his Master, the sentence of condemnation passed upon him, instead of filling him with despair, must have gratified him, being the accomplishment of his project; whereas, the light wherein we have endeavoured to place his conduct shows this circumstance to have been perfectly natural.

He knew him to be thoroughly innocent, and expected that he would have wrought such miracles before the council as should have constrained them to believe. Therefore, when he found that nothing of this kind was done, and that the priests had passed the sentence of condemnation upon him, and were carrying him to the governor, to get it executed, he repented of his rash and covetous project, came to the chief priests and elders, the persons to whom he had betrayed him, offered them their money again, and solemnly declared the deepest conviction of his Master's innocence, hoping that they would have desisted from the prosecution. But they were obstinate, and would not relent; upon which his remorse rose to such a pitch, that, unable to support the torments of his own conscience, he went and hanged himself.

Thus, it is probable that the traitor's intention in delivering up

his Master, was not to get him punished with death, but only to lay him under a necessity of proving his pretensions before the grandees, whom he had hitherto shunned; thinking that if they had yielded, the whole nation would immediately have been raised forthwith to the summit of their expectations.

This account of Judas' conduct is by no means calculated to lessen the foulness of his crime, which was the blackest imaginable. For even in the light above-mentioned, it implied both an insatiable avarice and a wilful opposition to the counsels of Providence, and rendered the actor of it a disgrace to human nature. But it is calculated to set the credibility of the traitor's action in a proper light, and to show that he was not moved to it by anything suspicious in the character of his Master; because, according to his view of it, his perfidy, instead of implying that he entertained suspicions of his Master's integrity, plainly proves that he had the fullest conviction of his being the Messiah. Nor was it possible for any one who had been present at the miracles which Jesus wrought, and the doctrines which he delivered, to admit of a doubt of his being the Son of God, the Saviour of mankind, unless blinded by the most obstinate prejudice.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Jesus institutes the Sacrament, in Commemoration of his Death and Sufferings—Settles a Dispute which arose among his Disciples—Predicts Peter's cowardice in denying his Master—Fortifies his Disciples against the approaching shock—Foretels Peter's cowardice again—Preaches to, and prays with, his Disciples for the last Time—Passionate Address of our Lord to his Father, in the Garden.

THE great Redeemer, ever mindful of the grand design of his mission, even the salvation of lost and perishing sinners, was not in the least prevented by the treachery of his apostate disciple. For knowing that he must become a sacrifice for sin, &c., he instituted the sacrament of his supper, to perpetuate the memory of it throughout all ages. Accordingly, as they were eating the paschal supper, "Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body."—*Matt. xxvi.* Observe this rite no longer in remembrance of your deliverance from Egypt, but in remembrance of me; who, by dying for you, will bring you out of the spiritual bondage, a bondage far worse than the Egyptian under which your fathers groaned, and will establish you in the glorious liberty of the children of God. Do it in remembrance of me, who, by laying down my life, will ransom you from sin, from death, from hell,

and will set open the gates of heaven to you, that you may enter immortality in triumph.

Having given the bread to his disciples, he also took the cup, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."—*Matt. xxvi. 27, 28.* All of you, and all of my disciples, in all ages, must drink of this cup, because it represents my blood, shed for the remission of the sins of mankind; my blood, by which the new covenant between God and man is ratified. It is, therefore, my blood of the new covenant: so that this institution exhibits to your joyful meditation the grand basis of the hopes of the children of men, and perpetuates the memory of it to the end of the world. He added, "I will not drink henceforth of the fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."—*Matt. xxvi. 29.*

The manifestation of the Son of God is the most illustrious, the most momentous event, that is possible to engage the meditations of men. To his life and death, his resurrection and ascension into glory, we are indebted for our hopes and assurances of pardon, for our peace, for our happiness. To procure our salvation, he made the most amazing

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

condescension from the dignity he enjoyed with his Father, by putting on the vail of flesh : he poured divine instruction from his lips, and shone forth with an all-perfect and all-lovely example. For our benefit, he submitted to a course of the most cruel treatment from his bitter enemies, to the agonies of the cross, and to the stroke of the king of terrors. For our happiness, he arose again with power and lustre, ascended into the mansions of eternal happiness, manages our affairs with the Father, and holds the reins of government. With the greatest wisdom and goodness, therefore, this beneficent Jesus instituted a rite that should recal his love to our memory, and awake each pious passion in our breast ; a rite which, by the breaking of bread, and the pouring out of wine, should represent to us in a striking manner that most signal proof of the affection both of him and his heavenly Father, when his tender frame was exposed to wounds and bruises, when streams of the most precious blood issued from his sacred veins.

The more we reflect on this instance of divine love, the more we shall perceive that there was a peculiar propriety in pointing out, by a particular ordinance, a fact of such immense importance in the system of revelation. Nay, we may ven-

ture to conjecture, that in some dark and corrupt ages, when the Scriptures were but little known by the common people, and hardly studied by the priests, the death of our Saviour would have been almost forgotten, had not the remembrance of it been renewed by the celebration of this sacred ordinance.

It should also be remembered, that the vanities of the world, the allurements of sensual pleasure, the charms of ambition the splendour of riches—in short, temptations from present objects of every kind—have often too powerful an influence on our temper and conduct. They have a fatal aptitude to draw the soul aside to folly, and to obliterate the impressions of things divine. It was, therefore, a wise, a kind intention, of our great Redeemer, by a frequent repetition of the sacramental feast to call back the wandering heart of man to a sense of his duty and obligations as a Christian.

Besides, though the religion of the immaculate Jesus is altogether gentle, generous, and beneficent ; though its whole tendency is to correct the passions, sweeten the dispositions, and enlarge the affections of men ; and though it enforces all this upon us by motives surprisingly powerful and affecting ; yet, such is the perverseness of the human heart, jealousies and contentions, envy,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

wrath, and malice, too often find admittance there. Was it not, then, an instance of our Saviour's wisdom and benevolence, by uniting us together at the sacrament of his body and blood, to urge the putting away all bitterness, anger, evil-speaking, and revenge; and to inspire us with condescension, compassion, and love?

How careful, therefore, ought we to be in performing this duty appointed by our dying Saviour! We should, in order to receive it worthily, employ our meditation on the design and excellency of the gospel; on the noble system of the doctrines and duties it contains; on the illustrious, divine, and complete example of the blessed Jesus; on the important privileges, the valuable promises, and the ravishing prospects, his revelation affords; and on the bright and convincing evidence with which it is attended.

We should contemplate that essential and unparalleled benevolence of the Father, in appointing the means of our redemption; on the readiness manifested by the Son of God in undertaking our cause; and on his wonderful transactions in the prosecution of this grand, this amazing work. Above all, we should get impressed upon our souls a strong sense of the special and immediate purposes for which this sacrament was appointed.

When we actually join in communion, we should be careful that our affections be properly directed and warmly engaged. To have our hearts fixed upon the vanities, the profits, and the cares, of this world, is a direct violation of the ordinance; and therefore we should be extremely careful to maintain a right temper and behaviour at that time. We should study to abstract our thoughts as much as possible from every foreign, every terrestrial, consideration, and to have our passions fervently employed in the solemn service. "Retire, O my soul (each of us should say), from this inferior scene of things, from all its pleasures and all its pursuits, and hold communion with the Almighty, through his Son, the immaculate Jesus. Meditate upon that infinite grace of Omnipotence, which formed the amazing plan that displayed pardon, peace, and endless happiness to so undeserving a creature as thou art. Recollect that surprising condescension and tenderness of thy compassionate Redeemer, which induced him to bring down from heaven salvation to the sons of men. Call to mind the admirable instructions he offered, the charming pattern he exhibited, the hard labours and sufferings he endured, in the course of his ministry; especially call to mind the ignominy,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

the reproaches, the agonies he endured when he hung upon the cross, and purchased for thee eternal mercy. Think upon these affecting subjects, till thine heart is filled with sorrow for thine iniquities, till thy faith becomes lively, active, and strong; till thy gratitude and love are elevated to the highest pitch; till thy obedience is rendered uniform, steady, and complete. Hast thou, O my God, the parent of universal nature! hast thou so illustriously manifested thy compassion for sinners, as not to spare thine own Son! hast thou sent the Saviour into the lower world, in order to raise the children of men to immortality, perfection and glory? and am I now in thy presence on purpose to celebrate this institution, which requireth me to commemorate the death of the great Messiah, to declare my public acceptance of his excellent revelation, and my regard to my Christian brethren? May, then, the remembrance of his beneficence dwell upon my mind, and upon my tongue, for ever and ever! May I consider and comply with the intention of his gospel; and may sentiments of kindness and charity towards all my fellow mortals and fellow disciples reign in my breast with increasing purity, with increasing zeal!"

Such are the views that should

possess our souls when we partake of this sacred ordinance; but it will signify little to entertain these views at that time, unless the effects of them are apparent in our future conduct and conversation; for a transient glow of affection, or sallies of immediate delight, were not principally intended in this institution.

The blessed Jesus did not ordain it as a ceremony or charm, but as a proper method of establishing our hearts in the fear and love of God, who gave his only beloved Son to die for wretched sinners. Though ye have, therefore, O Christians! obeyed the Redeemer's command in this appointment, and found your passions greatly moved, yet this is not the whole required at your hands: it will justly be expected that you should live to the honour of your divine Master. As you have solemnly professed your faith in him, and your love towards him, the reality of your faith and love should be demonstrated by walking more strictly in the way of his precepts, and by abounding in that heavenly character and temper which his spotless example so engagingly recommends. Thus only will the sacrament become subservient to the most beneficial purposes. Thus only will it be instrumental in making us meet for sharing in the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

dignity and felicity possessed by our exalted Saviour.

May, therefore, all the followers of the immaculate Jesus, by uniting together at his sacred table, advance from holiness to holiness, till they arrive at the regions of eternal felicity!

Our blessed Saviour, after delivering the sacramental cup, and telling them that his blood was shed for them, mentioned the treachery of Judas a second time: "Behold, he is at hand that doth betray me." —*Matt. xxvi. 45.* This second declaration was made very properly after the institution of the sacrament, which exhibits the highest instance of our great Redeemer's love to mankind, his dying to obtain the remission of their sins; for it abundantly proves, that the person who could be deliberately guilty of such an injury to so kind a friend, must have been a monster, the foulness of whose ingratitude cannot be described by the force of language.

It is thought that some of the disciples, particularly struck with horror at the thought of Judas's treachery, rebuked him, by asking him, with surprise, how he could betray his Master? This accusation Judas, no doubt, repelled by impudently denying the fact: but consciousness of guilt giving edge to

the reproaches of his brethren, and to every circumstance of the affair, he immediately left the company, exceedingly displeased at thinking himself insulted and affronted.

The important, the awful scene, now approached, when the great work was to be finished. The traitor, Judas, was gone to the chief priests and elders for a band of soldiers to apprehend him; but this did not discompose the Redeemer of mankind; he took occasion to meditate on the glory that would accrue both to himself and to his Almighty Father from those sufferings, and spake of it to his disciples. "Now," said he, "is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him." He told them that, having already done honour to his Father by the past actions of his life, and being about to honour him yet farther by his sufferings and death, which would display his perfections, particularly his infinite love to the human race, in the most astonishing and amiable light, he was in his turn to receive honour from his Father; intimating, that his human nature was to be exalted to the right hand of Omnipotence; and that his mission from God was to be supported by irrefragable attestations. But his disciples imagining that he spake of the glory of a temporal kingdom, their ambition was again revived,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

and they began to dispute, with as much keenness as ever, which of them should be greatest in that kingdom. This contention Jesus suppressed by the arguments he had formerly used for the same purpose. Among the Gentiles, said he, they are reckoned the greatest who have the greatest power, and have exercised it in the most absolute manner: but your greatness shall be very different from theirs; it shall not consist in being unlimited with regard to tyrannical power, even though it should be joined with an affectation of titles which denote qualities truly honourable; but, whosoever desires to be great, or chief, among you, let him be so by his humility, and the service he renders to the rest, in imitation of me, your Master, whose greatness consists in this, that I am become the servant of you all. Adding, as they had continued with him in his temptation, he would bestow upon them such a kingdom as his Father had appointed for him. At the same time, to check their ambition, and lead them to form a just notion of his kingdom, he told them, that he was soon to leave them; and that whither he was going, they could not at that time follow him; for which reason, instead of contending with one another which of them should be the greatest, they would

do well to be united among themselves in the happy bond of love. For by loving one another sincerely and fervently, they would prove themselves his disciples, to the conviction of mankind, who could not be ignorant that love was a distinguishing part of his character.

This is termed a new commandment, not because mutual love had never been enjoined to mankind before, but because it was a precept of peculiar excellence, for the word, translated *new*, in the Hebrew language denotes excellence and truth; he also called this a new commandment, because they were to exercise it under a new relation, according to a new measure, and from new motives. They were to love one another, in the relation of his disciples, and in that degree of love which he had showed to them; for they were to lay down their lives for their brethren.

This excellent doctrine, however, did not make such an impression on Peter, as the words which Jesus had spoken concerning a place whither his disciples could not come. He, therefore, replied by asking where he was going? To which Jesus answered, "Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now, but shalt follow me afterward."

In order to make his disciples farther humble, watchful, and kindly

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

affectioned one towards another, he assured them that Satan was seeking to ruin them all by his temptations: "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he might sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Peter was greatly offended that his Master should have singled him out as the weakest: for so he interpreted his praying for him particularly: and, supposing that he mentioned Satan's seeking to sift him, as the thing which would hinder him from following his Master, replied, Why cannot I follow thee now? Is there any road more terrible than the dark valley of the shadow of death? Yet through these black and gloomy shades I am willing this moment to accompany thee.

Jesus, knowing his weak though sincere resolution, answered, Art thou so very confident of thine own strength? I tell thee, that this very night, before the cock crows, thou wilt thrice deny me to be thy Master.

Our blessed Saviour having finished what he had to say to Peter in particular, turned himself to his other disciples, and put them in mind, that when they were first sent out he directed them to rely

wholly upon the Almighty for assistance. When I sent you formerly, said he, to preach the gospel, you may remember I ordered you to go without any provision, either for your sustenance or defence, assuring you that, though you would indeed meet with great opposition, yet Providence would dispose some men in all places to be your friends, and to furnish you with all necessities; and accordingly you found that you wanted for nothing, but were wonderfully supported, without any care or provision of your own, in the long journey, and finished your work with success. But now the case is very different; the time of that greatest trial and distress, whereof I have often forewarned you, is just at hand: and you may now make all the provision in your power, and arm yourselves against it as much as you are able.

I have finished the work for which I was sent into the world; and nothing now remains for me but to undergo those sufferings which the prophets have foretold concerning me, and to complete this whole dispensation of Providence, by submitting at last to a cruel and ignominious death.

The disciples, thinking their great Master meant that they should arm themselves in a literal sense, and

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

endeavour to oppose the assaults that would shortly be made upon them by the Jews; answered, "Lord, here are two swords:" but the blessed Jesus, who only intended to convey an idea of their approaching distress and temptations, and to arm them against the surprise, replied, "It is enough;" you need not trouble yourselves about any more weapons of this nature for your defence.

Be not terrified and disconsolate, added the compassionate Jesus, because I have told you that I must undergo great sufferings; and be taken away from you for a time. You have always been taught to believe in God, who is the Almighty preserver and governor of all things; and to rely on him for deliverance in every affliction and distress.

Learn now, in like manner, to believe in me, who have all power committed to me, as the preserver and head of my church; and trust in me to accomplish fully all things that I have promised you. If you do this, and persist steadfastly in the belief of my doctrine, and in the obedience of my commands, nothing in this vale of misery, not even persecution, or death itself, shall be able to hinder you from attaining the happiness I have proposed to you. For in heaven, my Father's house, there is abundant room to

receive you; otherwise I would not have filled your minds with the hopes and expectation of happiness. But as there are mansions sufficient for you in another state, you may with confidence and assurance hope for the full accomplishment of my promises, notwithstanding all this present world may contrive or act against you. And ye ought also to bear patiently my departure from you at this time; since I only leave you to prepare a place, and open the portals of those eternal habitations where I shall be ever with you. When I have prepared a place for you in that eternal state, I will again return, and take you to myself. Nor shall you evermore be separated from me, but continue with me to all eternity, in full participation of my eternal glory and happiness, in the blissful regions of the heavenly Canaan. You must now surely know whither I am going, and the way that leads to these happy seats of immortality.

But the disciples, whose minds were not yet fully weaned from the expectation of a temporal power and glory, did not understand this discourse of their great and beloved Master. Accordingly Thomas replied, Lord, we cannot comprehend whither thou art going; and therefore must needs be ignorant of the way.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

To which the blessed Jesus answered, I myself, as I have often told you, am the true and only way to life; nor can any man go thither by any other way. If ye say, ye do not know the Father, I tell you, that no man who knoweth me can be ignorant of my Father, of his will, and the manner of pleasing him: if ye know me, ye must know that all my actions have been directed by the will of the Father, and for the glory of his name.

Philip answered, Lord, show us but once the Father, and we shall be fully satisfied.

Jesus replied, Have I been so long with you, Philip, and yet art thou a stranger to him who sent me? I tell you, that to know one, is to be acquainted with both. What then can you mean by desiring to see the Father, as if you could be still ignorant of him, after being so long acquainted with me? Be assured, Philip, that whatsoever I speak is the declaration of his will, and whatsoever I do is the operation of his power. And if you refuse to believe my own affirmation, yet, at least, let my works convince you: for they carry in them undeniable evidences of a divine power. "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto my Father."—*John* xiv. 12.

Surely, then, you have matter sufficient to comfort and support your spirits under the thoughts of my departure from you. Ye have abundant reason to believe that I have power to perform all the promises I have made you; and the design of my departure actually to perform them. When I am returned to my Father, ye shall soon receive sufficient pledges of my care and remembrance of you. You shall be endued with power not only to perform the same works ye have seen me do, as healing diseases, giving sight to the blind, casting out devils, and the like, for the conviction of the Jews; but even to do greater things than these; to speak with all kinds of tongues, and to propagate my religion among the Gentiles, even through all the nations of the earth.

And whatsoever ye shall ask my Father, in my name, as being my disciples, and in order to promote the work of the gospel, shall certainly be granted you. That God may be greatly glorified by the extraordinary success and spreading of the religion of his Son, I say, that whatsoever ye shall ask, I will take care after my return to the Father, that it shall be granted you. Only ye must remember, as the necessary condition upon which all depends, that ye be careful above all things,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

to continue steadfast and immovable in your obedience to my commands; this is the only true mark you can give of the sincerity of your love towards me; it is more than your grieving at my departure, or any other external indication of zeal whatsoever.

The Father, I say, shall send you another advocate and comforter, even the Holy Spirit, the author and teacher of truth, who shall guide and direct, assist and comfort you, in all cases. This Spirit the sensual and corrupt world cannot receive; having no knowledge of the divine truths, or disposition to be governed by them. But ye know them, and are disposed to entertain them. The Spirit of the Father is already within you, by his secret and invisible efficacy; and shall hereafter appear in you openly, by great and visible manifestations.

Thus, though I must depart from you, yet I do by no means leave you comfortless. I leave you with a promise of the Holy Spirit; and I leave you in expectation also of my own return. For though, after a very little while, I shall appear no more to the world, yet to you I will appear again; for I shall live again, and ye also shall live with me.

When, therefore, I have conquered and triumphed over death, ye shall understand more fully, and

it shall appear more visible, by great and manifest effects, that I act in all things agreeably to my Father's will, and am perfectly invested with his power; and that ye, in like manner, have my power and commission communicated to you; so that there is a perfect unity and communion between us. Only ye must remember, that the one necessary condition on which all depends is, that ye continue steadfast and immovable in your faith in me, and in your obedience to my commands. He, and he only, who embraces my doctrine, and obeys and practises it, shall be judged to be sincere in his love towards me. And he who loves me in that manner, shall be loved by my Father; and I myself also will love him, and manifest myself to him.

Here Judas Thaddeus interrupted his Master, saying, Lord, how wilt thou choose to manifest thyself to us, a few particular persons, and not to the generality of the world?

Jesus replied, I have already told you the reason for my acting in this manner; because the generality of the world are not disposed to obey my commandments, the only way of maintaining communion with me. But ye are disposed to embrace my doctrine, and to obey it; and, therefore, I manifest myself to you. And whoever else will so love me as to

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

keep my commandments, him also will I and my Father love, and will maintain communion with him, and all spiritual blessings shall be poured down upon him, and he shall be made a partaker of happiness and eternal life.

On the contrary, whoever loves me not, that is, obeys not my commandments, shall have no intercourse or communion with me. Neither will my Father love or honour him, or make any manifestations of himself to him; for, as my commandments are not my own but the Father's commandments, therefore, whoever dishonours me, my Father will look upon him as dishonouring himself.

These things have I briefly spoken to you now, according to the shortness of the time I am to continue with you, and to comfort you for the present against my departure. But when the Comforter whom I promised you is come, even the Holy Spirit, whom my Father shall send you on my account, he shall instruct you more fully, recalling to your remembrance what you have forgotten, explaining what is yet obscure, and supplying what is farther necessary to be taught you, and to be understood by you.

In the meantime, I take my leave of you, and my blessing I leave with you: not formally, and after

the common fashion of the world, but affectionately and sincerely, retaining a careful remembrance of you, and with an earnest desire and intention of returning again speedily to you. Wherefore be not overmuch grieved for me and my departure, nor fearful of what may then befall yourselves. I go away from you, but it is with an intention, as I have already told you, to return to you again. If you loved me with a wise and understanding affection, ye would rejoice, instead of grieving at my present departure; because I am going to my Father, the supreme author of all glory and happiness.

These things I have now told you before they come to pass, that when ye see them happen, your faith in me, and your expectation of the performance of all my promises, may be confirmed and strengthened. The time will not allow me to say much more to you at present; my end draweth near; the ruler of this world, the prince of the power of darkness, is at this instant employing all his wicked instruments to apprehend and destroy me. Not that either the power of the devil, or the malice of man, can at all prevail over me, but because the time of my suffering, according to the appointment of Divine Wisdom, is arrived; and that I may demon-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

strate to the world my love and obedience to my Father, I willingly submit myself to be put to death by the hands of sinful and cruel men. Rise up, let us be going, that I may enter on my sufferings.

Having thus spoken, they finished the passover with singing a hymn, and went out to the mount of Olives.

On their arrival at the place which was to be the scene of his sufferings, he desired them to fortify themselves by prayer, and forewarned them of the terrible effects his sufferings would have upon them; they would make them all stumble that very night, agreeably to the prophecy of Zechariah: "I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." To strengthen their faith, therefore, he not only mentioned his own resurrection, but told them they should see him in Galilee, after he was risen from the dead.

On our blessed Saviour's mentioning the offence that his disciples would take at his suffering, Peter recollected what had been said to him in particular, before they left the house. Grieved, therefore, afresh, to find his Master entertain such thoughts of him, and being now armed with a sword, the vehemence of his temper urged him to boast a second time of his coura-

geous and close attachment to his Master. "Though all men," said he "should be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." But Jesus, knowing that human confidence and security were weak and frail, thought proper to forewarn him again of his danger, and told him, that the cock should not crow before he had denied him.

Peter, however, still continued to repeat his confidence—I will die with thee, but never deny thee. The disciples all joined with Peter in professing their fixed resolution of suffering death, rather than they would deny their Master; but the event fully confirmed the prediction of our Saviour. From hence we may learn, how ignorant men are of their own hearts, and that the strongest resolutions in their own strength avail nothing.

The compassionate Redeemer of mankind, not willing to lose one single moment of the short time of his ministry that yet remained, continued to instruct his disciples in the great truths he came into the world to explain; and, from the vines which were growing round him on the mount of Olives, he began his excellent discourse with the parable of the vine, to the following import.

Hitherto, said the blessed Jesus, the Jewish church and nation have

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

been the peculiar care of Providence; as a choice and goodly vine, likely to bring forth much fruit, is the special care of the husbandman. But from henceforth my church, my disciples, and the professors of my religion, of what country or nation soever they be, shall become the people of God, and the peculiar care of divine Providence. I will be to them as the root and stock of a vine, of which they are the branches, and my Father the husbandman and vine-dresser.

As in the management of a choice vine, the skilful vine-dresser cuts off all barren and superfluous branches, that they may not burden nor exhaust the tree; and prunes and dresses the fruitful branches, that they may grow continually, and so bear more fruit: thus, in the government of my church, all useless, wicked, and incorrigible members my Father, sooner or later, by his judgments, cuts off and destroys; but those who are sincerely pious and good, he, by the various and merciful dispensations of his Providence towards them, tries, purifies, and amends, that they may daily improve, and be more and more abundant in all good works.

Now ye, my apostles, are such members as these, being purified in heart and mind, and prepared for every good work, by your lively

faith in me, and sincere resolutions to obey my commands. Continue steadfastly in this state, and then you may be sure of deriving all spiritual blessings from me, as the branches receive sap and nourishment from the vine. But, as a branch without continuing in the vine cannot bear any fruit, but presently dries up and perishes; so ye, unless ye continue steadfast in your communion with me (by a lively faith and sincere obedience, so as to receive grace and spiritual blessings,) can never bring forth any good fruit of true holiness and righteousness, but will fall into vanity, superstition, and wickedness; and, at last, utterly perish.

I am, as it were, I say, the root and stock of the vine whereof ye are the branches. He that continues to me, by a constant faith in me, shall bring forth much fruit unto everlasting life; even as a branch which continues to grow in a vine, and receives sap and nourishment from it. But he that does not continue his relation to me in this manner, becomes a false and useless professor, and shall be cast out from me, and perish for ever; even as a fruitless branch is cut off from the vine, and left to wither and dry, and is, at last, burned in the fire.

If you continue in me, by believ-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

ing my words, and holding fast what ye believe, and obeying and practising it accordingly; no power or malice, either of man or of devils, shall be able to hurt you, or oppose your doctrines. For though I be absent from you in body, yet I will hear your prayers, and my Father himself will also hear you: and whatsoever ye shall ask, for the glory of the Almighty and the propagation of my true religion in the world, shall certainly be granted you. But, above all things, carefully remember to demonstrate your continuance in me, by abounding in all good works of holiness, righteousness, and charity. This is the honour which my Father desires and expects from you; even as it is the glory and desire of a vine-dresser that his vine should bring forth much fruit. And this is the honour that I myself expect from you, that ye shall prove yourselves to be really and indeed my disciples, by imitating my example, and obeying my commands. This ye are bound to do, not only in duty, but in gratitude also; for as my Father hath loved me, so have I also loved you; and ye in like manner ought to love me again, that you may continue to be loved by me. But the way to express your love towards me, and to continue to be loved by me, is to keep my commandments; even as

I, by keeping my Father's commandments, have expressed my love towards him, and continue to be loved by him.

These things have I spoken to you before my departure, that the comfort ye have taken in my presence may be continued in my absence, and even increased, until the coming of the Holy Spirit; as it will be upon this condition, which I have so often repeated to you, that you keep my commandments. And the principal of these commandments is, that ye love one another; not after the common fashion of the world, but in such a manner as I have loved you: nor can you be ignorant what sort of love that is, when I tell you that I am now going to lay down my life for you. This is the highest instance in which it is possible for a man to express his love towards his greatest friends and benefactors; but this I am now going to do for you, and for all mankind. I do not consider you as my benefactors, but as my friends, upon this easy condition only, that ye keep my commandments. I might, indeed, justly call you servants, considering the infinite distance between me and you, and the obligations ye have to obey my commandments; but I have not treated you as servants (who are not admitted into their Master's councils),

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

but as friends, revealing to you the whole will of my Father with all freedom and plainness.

I have, I say, behaved myself to you as to the nearest friends. Not that you first obliged me, or did any acts of kindness for me; but I have freely, and of my own good pleasure, chosen you to be my apostles, and the preachers of my gospel, that you may go and declare the will of God to the world, and bring forth much and lasting fruit, in the conversion of men to the knowledge of the truth, and to the profession and practice of true religion. In the performance of this work, whatsoever ye shall ask of my Father, in my name, in order to enable you to perform it effectually and with full success, shall certainly be granted you.

Now all these things, which I have spoken unto you concerning the greatness of my love towards you, in choosing you to be my apostles, in revealing unto you the whole will of my Father, and in laying down my life for you, I have urged and inculcated upon you, for this reason chiefly, as I first told you, that ye may learn, after my example, to "love one another." The world, indeed, you must expect will hate and persecute you, upon my account. But this you ought not to be surprised or terrified at,

knowing that it is no worse treatment than I myself have met with before you.

Be not, therefore, surprised when ye meet with opposition; nor think to find better treatment in the world than I myself have done. Remember what I have already told you, that the disciple is not above his Master; nor is he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If men had generally and readily embraced my doctrine, you might, indeed, have had some reason to expect that they would willingly have received yours also. But since I myself have suffered great indignities and persecutions from wicked and perverse, from obstinate and incorrigible men, only for opposing their vices, it is highly reasonable that you should expect to undergo the like treatment upon the like account. In all which sufferings, you will, moreover, have this farther comfortable consideration to support you, that the justice of your own cause, and the injustice of your persecutors, will by that means most evidently appear; seeing ye are persecuted only for professing and preaching in my name the doctrine of true religion, and they persecute you only because they know not God, and out of mere malice will not bear to be instructed in his commands.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Indeed, had not I appeared to the world with all possible demonstrations of authority and truth, teaching them a most holy and undeniable doctrine, sufficient to reform their manners and amend their lives, and moreover demonstrated my divine commission by such proofs as ought to satisfy and convince the most doubting and suspicious minds, they might have had some plea and excuse of ignorance for their unbelief. But now, since all reasonable evidence has been offered them, and proper methods used for their conversion and salvation, and yet they wilfully and obstinately reject these means of grace, it is plain they have no excuse for their sin; but they oppose and persecute you only because they will not forsake their worldly lusts, and out of mere malice will not bear to be instructed in the commands of the Almighty. So that they who oppose and persecute you, as they have before persecuted me, show plainly that they are haters of God and of his most holy commandments. Which is, as I have already told you, a plain evidence of the justice of your own cause, and the injustice of your persecutors.

If I had not, I say, done such works among them as no man ever did, they might, indeed, have had

some appearance of excuse for their sin. But now, having seen abundant proofs of my authority, and undeniable evidence of the truth of my doctrine, and yet wilfully and obstinately persisting to oppose it, because inconsistent with their lusts, it is plain that their dishonouring me is a dishonour done to my Father himself, and a direct contempt of his commands: so that they are utterly inexcusable. But it is no wonder, when men have given themselves wholly up to be governed by worldly affections, passions and vices, they should act contrary to all the reason and evidence in the world. For this is but the natural consequence of obstinate and habitual wickedness; and hereby is only fulfilled in me what holy David long since prophetically complained of, that they hated him without a cause.

But notwithstanding all the opposition that wicked and incorrigible men will make against my doctrine, there will not be wanting powerful promoters of it, who shall effectually overcome all opposition. For the Comforter, whom I said I will send you from heaven, even that Spirit of truth which cometh forth and is sent from the Father, shall, when he cometh, with wonderful efficacy bear testimony to the truth of my doctrine, and cause it to be

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

spread through the world with incredible success. Nay, and ye yourselves also, though now so weak, fearful, and doubting, shall then very powerfully bear testimony to the truth of all the things whereof ye, having been all along present with me, have been eye-witnesses from the beginning.

Thus have I warned you, beforehand, of the opposition and persecution ye must expect to meet with in the world, that when it cometh ye may not be surprised and terrified, so as to be discouraged thereby from persisting in the performance of your duty.

Ye must expect particularly that the chief priests and rulers of the Jews, men of great hypocrisy and superstition, zealous for their ceremonies and ritual traditions, but careless to know and obey the will of the Almighty in matters of great and eternal obligation, and invincibly prejudiced against the spiritual holiness and purity of my doctrine; these, I say, you must expect will excommunicate you as apostates, and cast you out of all their societies, as the vilest of malefactors. Nay, to such an absurd height of malice will their supposition carry them, that they will even fancy they promote the service of God and the cause of religion, when they most barbarously murder and destroy you.

But I have warned you of all this beforehand, that ye may prepare and fortify yourselves against it; and that when it cometh to pass, ye may remember I foretold it to you, and your faith in me may thereby be strengthened.

It was needless to acquaint you with these scenes of suffering while I was with you: but now being about to leave you, I think it necessary to acquaint you what things are likely to come upon you after my departure, and also, at the same time, what comfort you may expect to support you under them.

Now I must mention the melancholy part; namely, that I am going from you, and that great temptations will befall you in my absence: this indeed ye readily apprehend, and suffer your hearts to be overwhelmed with grief at the thoughts of it. But the comfortable part of my discourse, namely, that my departure is only in order to return to Him that sent me, and that I will soon after send you the Holy Spirit, and the other advantages that will thence result to you, are neither considered, nor are you solicitous about them. Nevertheless, if ye will listen, I will plainly tell you the truth. Ye are so far from having reason to be dejected at the thoughts of my departure, that, on the contrary, it is really profitable and expedient for

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

you that I should now depart: for such is the order and dispensation of Providence towards you, and the appointment of my Father's eternal and all-wise council, that before I go and take possession of my kingdom, the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, cannot be sent unto you; but when I am departed from you, and have all power in heaven and in earth committed unto me, then I will send him unto you. And when he cometh, he shall abundantly support and comfort you under all your troubles; shall powerfully plead your cause against your adversaries; and shall, with wonderful efficacy, cause the doctrine of the gospel to spread and prevail in the world, against all opposition. He shall particularly and in the most extraordinary and convincing manner, make the world sensible of the greatness and heinousness of a sin of which they were not aware; of the righteousness and justice of a dispensation they did not understand; and of the execution of a most remarkable judgment they did not expect.

First, by wonderfully attesting and confirming the truth of my doctrine, by the gift of tongues and other wonderful signs, he shall convince the world of the greatness and heinousness of their sin in disbelieving and rejecting me.

Secondly, by demonstrating that my departure out of the world was not perishing and dying, but only a returning to my Father, in order to be invested with all power both in heaven and earth, he shall convince the world of the righteousness and justice of my cause, and of the excellency of that dispensation which I preach and declare to mankind.

Lastly, by mightily destroying the power of the devil and the dominion of sin, and propagating the doctrine of true religion in the world with wonderful efficacy and success, he shall convince men of my power and authority to execute judgment upon mine enemies, for the establishment of my kingdom upon earth.

There are yet many other things hereafter to be done, in relation to the settling and establishing of my church, which, if it were proper, I would now acquaint you with; but ye are not yet prepared to understand and receive them.

Howbeit, when the Spirit of truth whom I promised you, is come, he shall enlarge your understandings, remove your prejudices, and instruct you in all necessary and divine truths, to enable you to go through that great work which I have begun in person, and which I will carry on by your ministry; for the Spirit is not to begin any new work, or to

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

found any new doctrine of himself. But as I have taught, and will teach you only in my Father's name, so the Spirit shall instruct you only in mine and my Father's will, and in things necessary to promote and carry on the same design.

Everything that he does shall be only in order to manifest my glory, and establish my religion in the world; even as everything that I have done has been only to manifest my Father's glory, and reveal his will to mankind. For as all I have taught is only what I received from my Father, so all that the Spirit shall teach you is only what he receives from me.

Whatsoever, I say, the Spirit shall teach you, is only what he receives from me: for receiving from my Father, I call receiving from me; and teaching his will, is teaching mine; seeing all things that the Father hath are common to me, and all power and dominion by him committed to me.

And now be careful to remember what matter for comfort I have given you, and support yourselves with it under the approaching distress. It is now, indeed, but a very little while before I shall be taken away from you; nevertheless, let not this cause you to despair; for after I am departed it will be also a little while before I appear to you

again; forasmuch as my being taken away from you is not perishing, but only returning to my Father.

At these last words of Jesus, the disciples were greatly disturbed and troubled, not understanding his true meaning, that in a very short time he should be taken from them by death; and that after having overcome death, by a glorious resurrection, he would appear to them again, before his ascension into heaven. Not understanding this, I say, they inquired one of another, What can he mean, by telling us that in a very little time he shall be taken out of our sight; and that in a very little time more we shall see him again, and this because he goeth to the Father? We cannot understand the meaning of all this. Jesus observing their perplexity, and knowing that they were desirous of asking him, replied, Why are ye thus disturbed and perplexed about what I told you? Is it a thing so very hard to be understood, that I said, within a very little time I should be taken away from you, and that within a very little time more I should appear to you again? Verily, verily, I tell you I must very soon depart out of this world. Then the world, who are your enemies, will rejoice and triumph over you, as if they had destroyed me and wholly suppressed you: and ye for

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

your parts, will be overwhelmed with grief and sorrow. But within a short time I will return to you again, and then your sorrow shall be turned into exceeding great joy.

Even as a woman when she is in labour hath great pain and sorrow for the present, but as soon as she is delivered forgets all her sufferings, and rejoices greatly at the birth of her son; so ye, while ye are under the immediate apprehensions of my departure from you, and during that time of distress and temptation which shall befall you in my absence, will be full of sorrow and anxiety of mind: but when I return to you again, then shall ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, and no power or malice of man shall ever be able to take from you any more the cause or continuance of it.

But though I shall return to you again, and your hearts will thereupon be filled with inexpressible joy, and which never shall be taken from you any more; yet there will be no necessity that I should then continue long with you in person, to instruct you upon every occasion with my own mouth. For, besides that the Holy Spirit will be sent to instruct you in all things necessary, my Father himself also will hear your petitions, and be ready to grant you whatsoever you shall desire of him in my name, as being my disciples.

Hitherto ye have asked nothing of God in my name: but henceforth put up your petitions in my name: and whatsoever ye shall so ask, for the glory of God, and in order to enable you to go through the work of your ministry successfully, shall certainly be granted you: that your joy, which will begin at my appearing to you again after my death, may be completed by the wonderful success and efficacy of your own ministry.

These things I have told you at present imperfectly and obscurely, according as your capacities are able to bear them. But the time is coming when I will speak to you with more openness, freedom, and plainness, the whole will of my Father concerning the nature and establishment of my kingdom, and for what things and in what manner ye ought to pray unto him.

At that time ye shall with firm assurance pray to my Father in my name for what ye want. And I need not tell you, that I will intercede with the Father on your behalf; for beside the love he has borne for me, and the power and authority my prayers have with him, he has moreover of himself a great love for you, and a ready disposition to grant your prayers, because ye are become grateful and acceptable to him, by your love towards me, which ye have shown in embracing willingly

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

that holy doctrine which I have revealed to you from him.

To conclude, the sum of what I have told you is briefly and plainly this: I came down from heaven upon earth from God my Father, and have lived in the state of frail and mortal man, that I might reveal to mankind the will of my heavenly Father, and the way to attain eternal life and happiness; and now, having finished this great work, I am about to leave this world, and return again to my Father from whence I at first came.

These last words of Jesus being more plain and express than any he had before spoken, so that now the disciples clearly perceived that the departure he had so often mentioned was no other than his actual going out of this world; they replied, Now, Lord, you speak plainly and without any figure; so that we apprehend fully what you mean. And now that our curiosity is satisfied, you have likewise greatly confirmed our faith; having given us a certain token whereby we are assured that you know all things, even the hearts and secret thoughts of men; since you have answered us a question which gave us great perplexity, and were desirous to ask your opinion, but were afraid; but now we are convinced that you are endued with a truly divine power, and did indeed come forth from

God. To which Jesus answered, And do you now at length firmly believe in me? Are ye resolved to continue steadfast in this faith? Do you think yourselves able to persevere immovably in the profession of it? Be not confident of your own strength; but pray that ye may be delivered from temptation in the time of distress, such as will come upon you much sooner than ye expect. For I tell you that ye will all of you within a few hours utterly forsake me, and fly, in hopes to secure yourselves, leaving me alone. And yet I should not say alone, since my Father is with me, who is more than all. I have, therefore, acquainted you with these things beforehand, that your minds may be furnished with sufficient matter of comfort and strength to bear up under all temptations, from the consideration of my having foretold both what distress will befall you, and how ye shall terminate your victory over all your enemies. You, must, indeed, expect to meet with much affliction, but let not this discourage you, I have subdued the world; follow my example, and partake of my reward.

Having thus finished his discourse, "Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven," and prayed with great fervency to his Father: (the prayer itself is recorded in the seventeenth

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

chapter of John); the substance and import of it as follows : O Almighty Father, now the time of my suffering, for which I was sent into the world, is arrived ; I entreat thee, support me under it, and make me triumph over death by a glorious resurrection and ascension into heaven ; that by these means the glory may redound to thee, and cause thy will to be believed and obeyed through all the world, to the salvation of mankind ; according to the full intent of that office and power with which thou didst originally invest me. In order to the bringing about this great design of salvation, I have declared thy will to mankind ; I have published thy precepts, and discharged the great mission entrusted to me ; I have preached thy doctrine of repentance to salvation, and have finished the work which thou sentest me to do, to the glory of thy name upon earth ; and now, to complete the great design, do thou, O Almighty Father, likewise glorify me with thine own self. Support me under my sufferings : let me prevail and triumph over death by a glorious resurrection, and exalt me again to the same glory in heaven which I had with thee before the creation of the universe. I have manifested thy will to the disciples, the men that thou gavest me out of the

world ; to those persons thou didst in thine infinite wisdom appoint that thy truth should be made known. Therefore to them I have revealed the mysteries of thy kingdom, the precepts of thy gospel, and the doctrine of thy salvation.

And this doctrine they have willingly embraced, steadfastly adhered to, and sincerely obeyed : as they are fully satisfied and convinced that what I taught them, as from thee, was really a divine doctrine, taught by thine immediate appointment and command ; and that I did not preach any human invention or institution of men, but was really sent by thy divine authority and commission.

“ For these persons, therefore, I now pray, that as thou hast begun the work of their salvation, by my preaching and revealing to them thy will, while I have been present with them here upon earth ; so also, that thou wouldest preserve them, when I am departed from this world, and complete the work of their redemption by my resurrection, and ascension into heaven after my death. I do not pray for the unbelieving impenitent world, but for those who have embraced that most holy doctrine, which thou hast taught them through me by my preaching ; for those who have glorified, and will glorify, my name

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

by their ministry, and who, consequently, are to be esteemed as thine own, in common with me. I am now about to leave the world, in order to return to thee: but these my disciples, who shall continue after me, I recommend to thy divine protection when I shall be gone: endue them with powers to persevere in preaching and practising the truth, and to deliver the same holy doctrines which I have given to them, that so they may remain inseparably united to me, as I am to thee. So long as I have been with them in the world, I have watched over them, and kept them from falling away, both by example, preaching, and continual admonition, according to the power and authority which thou didst commit to me; nor has any one of my apostles miscarried under my care, except that perfidious traitor, who, as the Scriptures foretold, has ungratefully conspired with my enemies to destroy me, and will perish according to his deserts. While I have continued with my disciples, I have watched over them and preserved them under mine own eye: but now, as I am going to leave the world, I beseech thee to keep and assist them by thy good Spirit, and let the expectation of their continuing under thy special care and protection, be their comfort and

support in my absence. The world, indeed, will persecute and hate them on this account, as my doctrine is repugnant to the lusts and affections, the passions, designs, and inclinations of worldly men; it must necessarily be that the vicious and incorrigible world will oppose and persecute them, as it has before persecuted me. I beseech thee, therefore, to take them under thy particular care, to support them against the violence and oppression of an evil world. I do not desire that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but preserve them in it, to be instruments of thy word, thy glory, and to be teachers of thy truth; nor suffer them to be either destroyed by the malice and violence, or corrupted by the evil customs and opinions of a perverse and wicked generation.

They are of a temper and spirit very different from the current affections and common dispositions of the world, according to the example of purity which I have set before them. Do thou preserve and increase in them that moderation and candour of mind, cause them to be thoroughly affected and impressed with that true doctrine so frequently recommended to them from my mouth, so as to express it visibly in their lives and practice, and to promote it zealously in their preach-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

ing, that they may both by their word and good example become worthy and successful ministers of my gospel.

For as thou hast sent me into the world to reveal thy will to mankind, so send I these my apostles to continue preaching the same doctrine begun by me. And the principal design of my exemplary life, constant teaching, and now voluntary offering of myself to death, is to atone for sins, and enable these my servants to preach my doctrines with success and efficacy for the salvation of men. Neither pray I for these my apostles only, but for all others who shall, by their preaching and practice, promote thy true religion; and, being converted from the world, may, by their sincere endeavours, go on to reform others, convincing the world of the excellency of their religion, and consequently enforcing men to acknowledge the truth and divine authority thereof. For promoting which great end I have communicated to my apostles the same power and authority of doing mighty works, for the confirmation of their doctrine and the evidence of thy truth, as thou didst communicate to me; that so I working in them, as thou hast done in me, and thus confirmed with great efficacy and demonstration of the Spirit, they may declare the

same doctrine which I published in person: the world may, by this evidence, be convinced that I was really sent by thee, and that my disciples act by the same divine commission.

Holy and Almighty Father, all those whom thou hast given me, who hath heartily embraced my doctrine, and sincerely obeyed it, I desire that thou wouldest make them partakers of the same happiness with myself, and exalt them to behold the incomprehensible glory which I had with thee, in thy eternal love, before the foundation of the world. The generality of mortals, O righteous Father! have not known thee, nor been willing to embrace and obey the revelation of thy will. But I have known thy will, and have made it known to my disciples, men of simplicity and honesty; and they have embraced and obeyed it. And I will continually make it known to them more and more, that they may grow up and improve in faith, in holiness, and in all good works, so as finally to arrive, and cause others to arrive, at that eternal happiness which is the effect of thy infinite love towards me, and through me towards them."

This pious and benevolent prayer being ended, Jesus and his disciples came down from the mount of Olives, into a field below, called

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Gethsemane, through which the brook Cedron ran, and in it, on the other side of the brook, was a garden, called the Garden of Gethsemane. Here he desired his disciples to sit down, till he should retire to pray, taking with him Peter, James, and John, those three select disciples, whom he had before chosen to be witnesses of his transfiguration, and now to be eye-witnesses of his passion, leaving the other disciples at the garden-door, to watch the approach of Judas and his band.

The sufferings he was on the point of undergoing were so great, that the very prospect of them excited this doleful exclamation: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; tarry ye here, and watch." On this great occasion he sustained those grievous sorrows in his soul, by which, as well as by dying on the cross, he became a sin-offering, and accomplished the redemption of mankind.

He now withdrew from them about a stone's cast, and his human nature being overburdened beyond measure, he found it necessary to retire and pray, that if it was possible, or consistent with the salvation of the world, he might be delivered from the sufferings which were then lying on him. It was not the fear of dying on the cross, which made

him speak or pray in such a manner. To suppose this would infinitely degrade his character. Make his sufferings as terrible as possible, clothe them with all the aggravating circumstances of distress; yet the blessed Jesus, whose human nature was strengthened by being connected with the divine, could not but shrink at the prospect of such sufferings as he had to endure. He addresses his divine Father with a sigh of fervent wishes, that the cup might, if possible, be removed from him. In the Greek it is, "O that thou wouldest remove this cup from me!" And having first kneeled and prayed, he fell prostrate on his face, accompanying his address with due expressions of resignation, adding immediately, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt."

Having prayed, he returned to his disciples, and finding them asleep, he said to Peter, "Simon, sleepest thou? couldest thou not watch one hour?" Thou, who so lately didst boast of thy courage and constancy in my service, canst thou so soon forget thy Master?

But in his great distress he never lost sight of that kind concern he had for his disciples. "Watch ye," says he, "and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." Neither was he on those extraordinary occasions in the least chagrined with the offences



Christ in the Garden.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

which they had committed through frailty and human weakness: on the contrary, he was always willing to make excuses for them; alleging in their defence, "that the spirit" truly "was willing, but the flesh was weak." It seems from these particulars, that he spent some considerable time in his addresses; because his disciples fell asleep in his absence, and he himself retired again to pray; for the sorrows of our Lord continuing to increase upon him, affected him to such a degree, that he retired a second time, and prayed to the same purpose, saying, "O, my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done:" after which he returned again to them, and found them asleep, "for their eyes were heavy."

He returned thus frequently to his disciples, that they, by reading his distress in his countenance and gesture, might be witnesses of his passion; which proves that his pains were beyond description intense and complicated: for he went away the third time to pray, and notwithstanding an angel was sent from heaven to comfort and strengthen him, yet they overwhelmed him, and threw him into an agony; upon which he still continued to pray more earnestly.

But the sense of his sufferings

still increasing, they strained his whole body to so violent a degree, that his blood, as it were, was pressed through the pores of his skin, which it pervaded, together with his sweat, and fell down in large drops on the ground. "And he left them, and went away again. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." Thus did he suffer unspeakable sorrows in his soul, as long as the Divine Wisdom thought proper.

At length he obtained relief, being heard on account of his perfect and entire submission to the will of his heavenly Father. "And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow." This circumstance shows how much the disciples were affected with their Master's sufferings. The sensations of grief which they felt on seeing his unspeakable distress, so overpowered them, that they sunk into a sleep.

Our blessed Saviour, for the last time, came to his disciples, and seeing them still asleep, he said, "Sleep on now, and take your rest; behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going;

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.”—*Matt.* xxvi. 45, &c. The event will soon be over which causes your sorrow : I am betrayed, and ready to be delivered unto death.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The blessed Redeemer is taken by a band of Soldiers, at the information of the traitor Judas—Heals a wound given the High-priest's Servant by Simon Peter.

JUDAS, who had often resorted to the garden of Gethsemane, with the disciples of our Lord, knowing the spot, and the usual time of his Master's repairing thither, informed the chief priests and elders that the proper time for apprehending Jesus was now come. They, therefore, sent a band of soldiers with him, and servants carrying lanterns and torches to show them the way ; because, though it was always full-moon at the passover, the sky might be dark with clouds, and the place whither they were going was shaded with trees. At the same time a deputation of their number accompanied the band, to see that every one did his duty.

Judas having thus received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, they went thither with lanterns, and torches, and weapons ; for they were ex-

ceeding anxious to secure and get him into their hands ; and the soldiers having, perhaps, never seen Jesus before, found it necessary that Judas should distinguish him, and point him out to them by some particular sign.

The treacherous Judas went before the band, at a small distance, to prepare them for the readier execution of their office, by kissing his Master, which was the token agreed upon, that they might not mistake him and seize a wrong person. “And he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him.” Stung with remorse at the horrid engagement into which he had entered, and not being now able to retract from the execution of it, he determined to make use of art in his vile proceedings, and weakly imagined he could deceive him whom he was about to betray, on a supposition that when he should give the kiss, it might be considered by his Master as a singular mark of his affection. When, therefore, they approached near the spot, Judas (who was at the head of the band) suddenly ran forward, and coming up to Jesus, said, “Hail, Master ! and kissed him. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come ? Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss ?” Before,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

however, Judas could make any reply, the band (who had fixed their eyes on the person he had kissed) arrived immediately, and surrounded Jesus.

The artifice and wicked designs of the base and perfidious Judas are here manifestly displayed. In order to conceal his villainy from his Master and his disciples, he walked hastily ; and, without waiting for the band, went up directly and saluted him ; wishing, perhaps, to have that considered as a token of apprising him of his danger. But Jesus did not fail to convince him that he knew the meaning and intent of his salutation, saying, "Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?" Judas certainly concealed his treachery so well that Peter did not suspect him, or it is probable he would have struck at him rather than at Malchus, the high-priest's servant.

The appointed time of our Lord's sufferings being now come, he did not, as formerly, avoid his enemies ; but, on the contrary, on their telling him they sought Jesus of Nazareth, he replied, "I am he ;" thereby intimating to them, that he was willing to put himself into their hands. At the same time, to show them that they could not apprehend him without his own consent, he, in an extraordinary manner, exerted his divine power ; he made the whole

band fall back, and threw them to the ground. "Jesus, therefore, knowing all things that should come upon upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye ? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said unto them, I am he. And Judas also, who betrayed him, stood with them. As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground." But the soldiers and the Jews, imagining perhaps that they had been thrown down by some demon or evil spirit, with whom the Jews said he was in confederacy, advanced towards him a second time. "Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye ? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he ;" expressing again his willingness to fall into their hands. "If, therefore, ye seek me, let these go their way." If your business be with me alone, suffer my disciples to pass : for the party had surrounded them also. He seems to have made this request to the soldiers, that the saying might be fulfilled which he spake, "Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none." For, as he always proportioned the trials of his people to their strength, so here he took care that the disciples should escape the storm, which none but himself could sustain.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

At length, one of the soldiers, more daring than the rest, rudely caught Jesus and bound him; upon which Peter drew his sword, and smote off the ear of the high priest's servant, who probably was showing greater forwardness than the rest in this business. "Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it, and smote the high-priest's servant, and cut off his right ear; the servant's name was Malchus." The enraged disciple was on the point of singly attacking the whole band, when Jesus ordered him to sheathe his sword; telling him, that his unseasonable and imprudent defence might prove the occasion of his destruction. "Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword."—*Matt.* xxvi. 52. He told him likewise, that it implied both a distrust of God, who can always employ a variety of means for the safety of his people, and also his ignorance in the Scriptures: "Thinkest thou," said he, "that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?"—*Matt.* xxvi. 53.

The word legion was a Roman military term, being a name which they gave to a body of five or six

thousand men; wherefore, in regard that the band, which now surrounded them, was a Roman cohort, our Lord might make use of this term, by way of contrast, to show what an inconsiderable thing the cohort was, in comparison of the force he could summon to his assistance; more than twelve legions, not of soldiers, but of angels. He was yet tenderly inclined to prevent any bad consequences which might have followed from Peter's rashness, by healing the servant, and adding, in his rebuke to him, a declaration of his willingness to suffer. "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

The circumstance of his healing the ear of Malchus by touching it, evidently implies that no wound or distemper was incurable in the hand of Jesus; neither was any injury so great that he could not forgive. It seems somewhat surprising that this evident miracle did not make an impression upon the chief priests, especially as our Lord put them in mind, at the same time, of his other miracles; for having first said, "Suffer ye thus far;—and he touched his ear, and healed him:" he added, "Be ye come out as against a thief, with swords and staves? When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

your hour and the power of darkness." — *Luke* xxi. 51, &c. The priests had kept at a distance for some time, but drew near when they understood that Jesus was in their power; for they were proof against all conviction, being obstinately bent on putting him to death. And the disciples, when they saw their Master in the hands of his enemies, forsook him, and fled, according to his prediction; notwithstanding they might have followed him without any danger, as the priests had no design against them. "Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled. Then the band, and the captain and officers, took Jesus, and bound him." But it was not the cord which held him; his infinite love was by far the stronger bond. He could have broken those weak ties, and exerted his divinity in a more wonderful manner; he could have stricken them all dead, with as much ease as he had before thrown them on the ground: but he patiently submitted to this, as to every other indignity which they chose to offer him; so meek was he under the greatest injuries. Having thus secured him, they led him away. "And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him: and he left the linen cloth,

and fled from them naked." This, perhaps, was the proprietor of the garden; who, being awakened by the noise, came out with the linen cloth, in which he had been lying, cast round his naked body; and having a respect for Jesus, followed him, forgetting the dress he was in.

They first led Jesus to Annas, father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was the high priest that year. Annas having himself discharged the office of high-priest, was consequently a person of distinguished character, which, together with his relation to the high-priest, made him worthy of the respect they now paid him. But he refused singly to meddle in the affair; they therefore carried Jesus to Caiaphas himself, at whose palace the chief priests, elders, and scribes, were assembled, having staid there all night to see the issue of their stratagem. This Caiaphas was he who advised the council to put Jesus to death, even admitting he was innocent, for the safety of the whole Jewish nation. He seems to have enjoyed the sacerdotal dignity during the whole course of Pilate's government in Judea; for he was advanced by Valerius Gracchus, Pilate's predecessor, and was divested of it by Vitellius, governor of Syria, after he had deposed Pilate from his procuratorship.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Fulfilment of our Lord's Prediction concerning Peter.

THE apprehending of their dear Master could not but strike his disciples with horror and amazement: though he had forewarned them of that event, such was their consternation, that they fled different ways; some of them, however, recovering out of the panic that had seized them, followed the band at a distance, to see what the issue would be. Of this number was Peter, and another disciple, whom John has mentioned without giving his name, and who, therefore, is supposed to have been John himself. This disciple being acquainted at the high-priest's, got admittance for himself first, and soon after for Peter, who had come with him. "And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. That disciple was known unto the high-priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high-priest. But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple which was known unto the high-priest, and spake unto them that kept the door, and brought in Peter. And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down

among them." The maid-servant, who kept the door, concluding Peter to be a disciple also, followed him after to the fire, and looking earnestly at him, charged him with the supposed crime. "Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art thou not also one of this man's disciples?" This blunt attack threw Peter into such confusion, that he flatly denied his having any connexion with Jesus; replying, "I am not;" and adding, "I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest." As if he had said, I do not understand any reason for your asking me such a question.

Thus the very apostle who had before acknowledged his Master to be the Messiah, the Son of the living God, and had so confidently boasted of his fortitude and firm attachment to him in the greatest dangers, proved himself an arrant deserter of his cause upon trial. His shameful fears were altogether inexcusable, as the enemy who attacked him was one of the weaker sex, and the terror of the charge was in a great measure taken off by the insinuation made in it, that John was likewise known to be Christ's disciple; for as he was known at the high-priest's, he was consequently known in that character. "Art thou not also one of this man's disciples?" Art thou not

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

one of them, as well as he who is sitting with you? Nothing can account for this conduct of Peter, but the confusion and panic which had seized him on this occasion. As his inward perturbation must have appeared in his countenance and gesture, he did not choose to stay long with the servants at the fire. He went out, therefore, into the porch, where he was a little concealed. "And he went into the porch: after he had been some time there, another maid saw him, and began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them: and again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man;" adding perjury to falsehood.

After Peter had been thus attacked without doors, he thought proper to return, and mix with the crowd at the fire. "And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself." From this circumstance, it is clear, that the ensuing was the third denial; and that Peter left the porch where the second denial happened, and was come again into the hall. "Here one of the servants of the high-priest (being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off), saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with him? Peter then denied again, and immediately the cock crew." The words of Malchus' kinsman bringing to Peter's remembrance what

he had done to that man, threw him into such a panic, that when those that stood by repeated the charge, he impudently denied it: "He even began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom you speak." For when they heard Peter deny the charge, they supported it by an argument drawn from the accent with which he pronounced his answer. Surely thou art one of them; for thou art a Galilean, and thy speech agreeth thereto: so that, being pressed on all sides, to give his lie the better colour, he profaned the name of God, by imprecating the bitterest curses on himself, if he was telling a falsehood. Perhaps he hoped, by these acts of impiety, to convince them effectually that he was not a disciple of the holy Jesus.

Thus the apostle denied his Master three distinct times, with oaths and asseverations, totally forgetting the vehement protestations he had made, a few hours before, that he would never deny him. He was, probably, permitted to fall in this manner, to teach us two lessons: first, that the strongest resolutions, formed in our own strength, cannot withstand the torrent of temptation; secondly, that the true disciples of Christ, though they fall, may be brought to a conviction of their sin; for he no sooner denied his Master

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

the third time, than the cock crew, and first awakened in him a consciousness of his sin. "And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter: and Peter remembered the words of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly." St. Luke is the evangelist who particularly mentions this beautiful circumstance of Christ turning and looking on Peter. The members of the council who sat on Jesus were placed at the upper end of the hall; at the other were the servants, with Peter at the fire; so that Jesus being, probably, placed on some eminence, that his judges, who were numerous, might see and hear him, could easily look over towards Peter, and observe him denying him, and in passionate terms, loud enough to be heard, perhaps, over all the place. The look pierced him, and, with the crowing of the cock, brought his Master's prediction fresh into his mind. He was stung with deep remorse; and being unable to contain himself, he covered his face with his garment, to conceal the confusion he was in, and, going out into the porch, wept very bitterly. All this passed while the priests examined Jesus with many taunts and revilings; and while the most zealous of Christ's disciples was denying him with

oaths and imprecations, the people insulted him in the most inhuman manner. Thus a complication of injuries, insults, and indignities, was at one time heaped upon the blessed Redeemer, the meek and mild Jesus, in order to fulfil the prophecies concerning him, and teach his followers a lesson of humility.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

The Saviour of the World is arraigned at the Bar of the Sanhedrim, and tried by the Jewish Council.

WHEN the band of soldiers arrived at the high-priest's with Jesus, they found there all the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders assembled. "And as soon as it was day, the elders of the people, and the chief priests, and the scribes, came together and led him into their council. And the high-priest asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine. He inquired of him what his disciples were—for what end he had gathered them—whether it was to make himself a king, and what the doctrine was which he taught them. In these questions there was a great deal of art; for as the crime laid to our Saviour's charge was, that he had set up for the Messiah, and deluded the people, they expected he would

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

claim that dignity in their presence, and so would, on his own confession, have condemned him without any further progress. This was unfair, as it was artful and ensnaring. To oblige a prisoner on his trial to confess what might take away his life, was a very iniquitous method of proceeding; and Jesus expressed his opinion thereof with very good reason, and complained of it, bidding them prove what they had laid to his charge by witnesses. "Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world: I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said." It was greatly to the honour of our blessed Redeemer, that all his actions were done in public, under the eye even of his enemies; because, had he been carrying on any impostures, the lovers of goodness and truth had thus abundant opportunities of detecting him with propriety: he, therefore, in his defence, appealed to that part of his character; but his answer was construed to be disrespectful; for "when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high-priest so? To

which he meekly replied, with the greatest serenity, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?" Show me, prove before this court, wherein my crime consists, or record it on the evidence on the face of my trial; which, if you cannot, how can you answer this inhuman treatment to a defenceless prisoner, standing on his trial before the world, and in open court?

Thus Jesus became an example of his own precept, "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek turn to him the other also,"—*Matt. v. 39*; bearing the greatest injuries with a patience that could not be provoked.

When the council found that Jesus declined answering the questions, whereby they expected to have drawn from him an acknowledgment of his being the Messiah, they proceeded to examine many witnesses, to prove his having assumed that character; as they considered such a pretension as blasphemy in his mouth, who, being only a man, according to their opinion, could not, without the highest affront to the divine Majesty, pretend to the title of the Son of God, as it belonged only to the Messiah.

But in this examination they acted like interested and enraged persecutors, rather than as impartial

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

judges, forming their questions in the most artful manner, in order if possible to draw expressions from him which they might pervert into suspicions of guilt, as some foundation for condemning Jesus, who had so long and faithfully laboured for their salvation.

Their witnesses, however, disappointed them; some of them disagreeing in their story, and others mentioning things of no manner of importance. At last, two persons agreed in their depositions, namely, in hearing him say, that he was able to destroy the temple of God, and to raise it in three days. But this testimony was absolutely false; for our great Redeemer never said he could destroy and build the temple of Jerusalem in three days, as they affirmed. It is true, that after banishing the traders from the temple, when the Jews desired to know by what authority he undertook to make such a reformation, he referred them to the miracle of his resurrection; bidding them "destroy this temple," (pointing probably to his body), and in three days he would raise it up. The witnesses, therefore, either through malice or ignorance, perverted his answer into an affirmation that he was able to destroy and build the magnificent temple of Jerusalem in three days; and the judges consi-

dered this assertion as blasphemy, because it could only be done by the divine power.

Our Saviour made no reply to the evidences that were produced against him, which greatly provoked the high-priest; who, supposing that he intended by his silence to put an affront on the council, rose from his seat, and with great perturbation demanded the reason for such remarkable conduct. "Answerest thou nothing?" said he: "what is it which these witness against thee?" And some of the council added, "Art thou the Christ?" To which our blessed Saviour answered, If I should tell you plainly, you would not believe me; and if I should demonstrate it to you by the most evident and undeniable arguments, ye would neither be convinced nor let me go.

The high-priest, finding all his attempts to trepan our Saviour in vain, said to him, I adjure you solemnly, by the dreadful and tremendous name of God, in whose presence you stand, that you tell me plainly and truly whether you are the Messiah, the Son of God.

The consequence attending the confession of the truth, did not intimidate the blessed Jesus: for, being adjured by the chief magistrate, he immediately acknowledged the charge; adding, Ye shall shortly see

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

a convincing evidence of this truth, in that wonderful and unparalleled destruction which I will send upon the Jewish nation; in the quick and powerful progress which the gospel shall make upon the earth; and finally, in my glorious appearance in the clouds of heaven, at the last day, the sign which you have so often demanded in confirmation of my mission.

Upon our blessed Saviour's making this answer, a number of them cried out at once, "Art thou the Son of God? To which our great Redeemer replied "Ye say that I am: a manner of speaking among the Jews, which expressed a plain and strong affirmation of the thing expressed.

When the high-priest heard this second assertion, he rent his clothes with great indignation, and said unto the council, Why need we trouble ourselves to seek for any more witnesses? Ye yourselves, nay, this whole assembly, are witnesses, that he hath spoken manifest and notorious blasphemy: What think ye? To which they all replied, that for assuming to himself the character of the Messiah, he deserved to be put to death.

Then began the servants and common people to fall upon him, as a man already condemned; spitting upon him, buffeting him, and offering him

all manner of rudeness and indignities. They blindfolded him; and some of the council, in order to ridicule him for having professed to be the great Prophet, bid him exercise his prophetic gift, in declaring who had smitten him.

Such was the treatment of the Son of God, the Saviour of sinners, which, though derogatory to his character, he bore with patience and resignation, leaving his people an example to follow his steps, and submit to the will of God in all things, nor murmur at any of the dispensations of his providence.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Our blessed Saviour is carried before the Roman Governor—The Traitor Judas becomes his own Executioner—Pilate publicly acquits Jesus, and refers his case to the decision of Herod.

THE blessed Jesus being thus condemned by the unanimous voice of the grand assembly, it was resolved to carry him before the governor, that he likewise might pass sentence on him. The Roman governors of Judea generally resided at Cesarea: but at the great feast they came up to Jerusalem to prevent or suppress tumults, and to administer justice; it being a custom for the Roman

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

governors of provinces to visit the principal towns under their jurisdiction, on this latter account. Pilate being accordingly come to Jerusalem, some time before the feast, had been informed of the great ferment among the rulers, and the true character of the person on whose account it was raised; for he entertained a just notion of it: "he knew that for envy they had delivered him." He knew the cause of their envy, was impressed with a favourable opinion of Jesus, and wished, if possible, to deliver him from his vile persecutors.

Early in the morning, the Jewish council brought Jesus to the hall of judgment, or governor's palace. They themselves, however, went not into the hall, but stood without, lest they should be defiled, and rendered incapable of eating the passover.

Now Judas Iscariot, who had delivered his Master into the hands of the council, finding his project turn out very different from what he expected, was filled with the deepest remorse for what he had done. He saw all his golden dreams of temporal honours and advantages sunk at once to nothing; he saw his kind, his indulgent Master condemned, and forsaken by all his followers. He saw all this, and determined to make all the satisfaction in his power for the crime he had committed.

Accordingly, he came and confessed openly his sin before the chief priests and elders, offering them the money they had given him to commit it, and earnestly wished he could recal the fatal transaction of the preceding night.

It seems he thought this was the most public testimony he could possibly give of his Master's innocence, and his own repentance. I have, said he, committed a most horrid crime in betraying an innocent man to death.

But this moving speech of Jesus had no effect on the callous heart of the Jewish rulers. They affirmed that however he might think the prisoner innocent, and for that reason had sinned in bringing the sentence of death upon his head, they were not to blame; because they knew him a blasphemer, who deserved to die. "What is that to us?" said they; "see thou to that." Nay, they even refused to take back the money they had given him as a reward for performing the base act of betraying his Master.

The deepest remorse now seized upon the wretched Judas, and his soul was agitated by the horrors of despair. The innocence and benevolence of his Master, the many favours he himself had received from him, and the many kind offices he had done for the sons and daughters



Street in Jerusalem.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

of affliction, crowded at once into his mind, and rendered his torments intolerable. Racked with those agonising passions, and unable to support the misery, he threw down the wages of his iniquity in the temple; and confessing at the same time his own sin and the innocence of his Master, went away in despair, and hanged himself.

Thus perished Judas Iscariot, the traitor, a miserable example of the fatal influence of covetousness, and a standing monument of divine vengeance, to deter future generations from acting in opposition to the dictates of conscience, through a love of the things of this world; for which this wretched mortal betrayed his Master, his friend, his Saviour, and accumulated such a load of guilt on himself, as sunk his soul into the lowest pitch of perdition.

The pieces of silver cast down by Judas were gathered up, and delivered to the priests; who, thinking it unlawful to put them into the treasury, because they were the wages of a traitor, agreed to lay them out in purchasing the potter's field, and to make it a common burial-place for strangers.

This, the evangelist tells us, was done that a particular prophecy, relating to the Messiah, might be fulfilled: "And they took the thirty

pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me." This prophecy is found in Zachariah; but, by a mistake of some copyist, the word Jeremiah is inserted in the Greek manuscripts of St. Matthew's Gospel; unless we suppose, with the learned Grotius, that this remarkable prophecy was first made by Jeremiah, and afterwards repeated, by the immediate direction of the Spirit, by Zachariah; and that, therefore, the evangelist has only ascribed the prophecy to its original author. But, however this be, the prophecy is remarkable, and was remarkably fulfilled. And the evangelist, by thus appealing to a public transaction, puts the truth of this part of the history beyond all manner of exception.

We have already observed, that the chief priests and elders refused to go themselves into the judgment-hall, lest they should contract some pollution in the house of a heathen, which would have rendered them unfit for eating the passover. The same reason also hindered them from entering the governor's palace on other festivals, when that magistrate attended in order to administer justice: a kind of structure was, therefore, erected, adjoining to the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

palace, which served instead of a tribunal, or judgment-seat. This structure, called in the Hebrew Gabbatha, was finely paved with small pieces of marble, of different colours, being always exposed to the weather. One side of this structure joined to the palace, and a door was made in the wall, through which the governor passed to the tribunal. By this contrivance the people might stand round the tribunal in the open air, hear and see the governor when he spoke to them from the Pavement, and observe the whole administration of justice, without danger of being defiled either by him or any of his retinue.

Before this tribunal the great Redeemer of mankind was brought; and the priests and elders having taken their places round the Pavement, the governor ascended the judgment-seat, and asked them what accusation they brought against the prisoner. Though nothing could be more natural than for the governor to ask this question, yet the Jews thought themselves highly affronted by it, and haughtily answered, If he had not been a very great and extraordinary malefactor, we should not have given you this trouble at all, much less at so unseasonable an hour.

Pilate then examined Jesus; and

finding he had not been guilty either of rebellion or sedition, but that he was accused of particulars relating to the religion and customs of the Jews, grew angry, and said, What are these things to me? Take him yourselves, and judge him according to your own law. Plainly insinuating, that, in his own opinion, the crime they laid to the prisoner's charge was not of a capital nature; and that such punishments as they were permitted by Cesar to inflict were adequate to any misdemeanour that Jesus was charged with. But this proposal of the Roman governor was absolutely refused by the Jewish priests and elders, because it condemned the whole proceeding; and therefore they answered, We have no power to put any one to death, as this man certainly deserves, who has attempted not only to make innovations in our religion, but also to set up himself for a king.

The eagerness of the Jews to get Jesus condemned by the Roman governor, who often sentenced malefactors to be crucified, tended to fulfil the saying of our great Redeemer, who, during the course of his ministry, had often mentioned what kind of death he was, by the counsel of his Father, appointed to die.

Pilate finding it impossible to prevent a tumult, unless he pro-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

ceeded to try Jesus, ascended again the judgment-seat, and commanded his accusers to produce their accusations against him. Accordingly, they accused him of seditious practices, affirming that he had used every method in his power to dissuade the people from paying taxes to Cesar, pretending that he himself was the Messiah, the great King of the Jews, so long expected. But they brought no proof of these assertions. They only insinuated that they had already convicted him of this assertion; which was absolutely false. Pilate, however, asked him, Is it true what these men lay to your charge. that you have indeed attempted to set up yourself as King of the Jews? To which Jesus replied, Have you ever, during your stay in this province, heard anything of me that gave you reason to suspect me guilty of secret practices and seditious designs against the government? or do you found your question only on the present clamour and tumult that is raised against me? If this be the case, be very careful lest you be imposed on merely by the ambiguity of a word: for, to be "King of the Jews," is not to erect a temporal throne in opposition to that of Cesar, but a thing of a very different nature; the kingdom of the Messiah, is a heavenly kingdom.

To which Pilate replied, Am I

a Jew? Can I tell what your expectations are, and in what sense you understand these words? The rulers and chiefs of your own people, who are the most proper judges of these particulars, have brought you before me as a riotous and seditious person; if this be not the truth, let me know what is, and the crime thou hast been guilty of.

Jesus answered, I have indeed a kingdom, and this kingdom I have professed to establish. But then it is not of this world, nor have my endeavours to establish it any tendency to cause disturbances in the government. For had that been the case my servants would have fought for me, and not have suffered me to have fallen into the hands of the Jews. But I tell you plainly, my kingdom is wholly spiritual. I reign in the hearts of my people, and subdue their wills and affections into a conformity to the will of God.

You acknowledge, then, in general, answered Pilate, that you have professed to be a king? To which the blessed Jesus replied, In the sense I have told you, I have declared, and do now declare, myself to be a king. For this very end I was born, and for this purpose I came into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth; and whosoever sincerely loves, and is always ready to embrace, the truth, will

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

hear my testimony, and be convinced by it.

Pilate answered, "What is truth?" and immediately went out to the Jews, and said unto them, I have again examined this man, but cannot find him guilty of any fault which, according to the Roman law, is worthy of death.

This generous declaration made by the governor of the innocence of our blessed Saviour, had no effect on the superstitious and bigoted Jews. They even persisted in their accusations with more vehemence than before, affirming that he had attempted to raise a sedition in Galilee: "He stirreth up," said they, "the people, beginning from Galilee to this place."

Jesus however, made no answer at all to this heavy charge. Nay, he continued silent, notwithstanding the governor himself expressly required him to speak in his own defence. A conduct so extraordinary, in such circumstances, astonished Pilate exceedingly; for he had great reason to be persuaded of the innocence of our dear Redeemer. The truth is, he was altogether ignorant of the divine counsel by which the whole affair was directed.

There were many reasons which induced the blessed Jesus not to make a public defence. He came

into the world purely to redeem lost and undone sinners, by offering up himself a sacrifice for them; but had he pleaded with his usual force, the people had, in all probability, been induced to ask his release, and consequently his death had been prevented. Besides, the gross falsehood of the accusation, known to all the inhabitants of Galilee, rendered any reply absolutely needless.

In the meantime, the chief priests continued to accuse him with great noise and tumult. And the meek and humble Jesus still continuing mute, Pilate spake again to him, saying, Wilt thou continue to make no defence? Dost thou not hear how vehemently these men accuse thee?

But Pilate, recollecting what the chief priests had said with regard to a sedition in Galilee, asked if Jesus came out of that country? and on being informed he did, he immediately ordered him to be carried to Herod, who was also then at Jerusalem.

The governor supposed that Herod, in whose dominion the sedition was said to have been raised, must be a much better judge of the affair than himself; besides, his being a Jew rendered him more versed in the religion of his own country, and gave him greater influence over

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

the chief priests and elders ; he therefore considered him as the most proper person to prevail on the Jewish council to desist from their cruel prosecution. But if, contrary to all human probability, he should at their solicitation condemn Jesus, Pilate hoped to escape the guilt and infamy of putting an innocent person to death. He might also propose by this action to regain Herod's friendship, which he had formerly lost by encroaching, in all probability, on his privileges.

But, however that be, or whatever motive induced Pilate to send our great Redeemer to Herod, the latter greatly rejoiced at this opportunity of seeing Jesus, hoping to have the pleasure of beholding him perform some great miracle.

In this he was, however, disappointed : for as Herod had apostatised from the doctrine of John the Baptist, to which he was once, probably, a convert, and had even put his teacher to death, the blessed Jesus, however liberal of his miracles to the sons and daughters of affliction, would not work them to gratify the curiosity of a tyrant, nor even answer one of the many questions he proposed to him.

Herod finding his expectation thus cut off, ordered our blessed Saviour to be clothed with an old robe, resembling in colour those

worn by kings, and permitted his attendants to insult him.

From Herod's dressing him in this manner, it evidently appears that the chief priests and elders had accused him of nothing but his having assumed the character of the Messiah ; for the affront put upon him was plainly in derision of that profession.

The other head of accusation, namely, his having attempted to raise a sedition in Galilee, on account of tribute paid to Cæsar, they did not dare to mention, as Herod could not fail of knowing it to be a gross and malicious falsehood. And no crime worthy of death being laid to his charge, Herod sent him again to Pilate. It seems that though he was displeased with the great Redeemer of mankind for refusing to work a miracle before him, yet he did not think proper to comply with the wishes of his enemies.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

The Roman Governor, for want of evidence, proposes to acquit and release Jesus, three several times : but at length, at the pressing instigation of the inveterate Jews, he condemns and delivers him up.

THE Roman governor, in order to acquire popular applause, used generally, at the feast of the passover, to release a prisoner nomi-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

nated by the people. At this feast there was one in prison, named Barabbas, who, at the head of a number of rebels, had made an insurrection in the city, and committed murder during the confusion.

The multitude, being now again assembled before the governor's palace, began to call aloud on him to perform the annual office of mercy customary at that festival.

Pilate, glad of this opportunity, told them that he was very willing to grant the favour they desired; and asked them whether they would have Barabbas or Jesus released unto them? But without waiting for an answer, he offered to release Jesus, knowing that the chief priests had delivered him through envy; especially as Herod had not found him guilty of the crimes laid to his charge.

While these particulars were transacting, Pilate received a message from his wife, then with him at Jerusalem, and who had that morning been greatly affected by a dream which gave her great uneasiness. The dream had so great an effect on this Roman lady, that she could not rest till she had sent an account of it to her husband, who was then sitting with the tribunal on the Pavement, and begged him to have no hand in the death of the righteous person he was then judging.

The people had not yet determined whether they would have Jesus or Barabbas released to them; therefore, when Pilate received the message from his wife, he called the chief priests and rulers together, and in the hearing of the multitude, made a speech to them, in which he gave them an account of the examination which Jesus had undergone, both at his own and Herod's tribunal; declaring, that in both courts it had turned out honourably to his character; for which reason he proposed to them that he should be the object of the people's favour.

Pilate did the priests the honour of desiring to know their inclinations in particular, perhaps with a design to soften their stony hearts, and, if possible, to move them for once to pity an injured, but innocent, man. But he was persuaded that if pity was absolutely banished from their callous breasts, his proposal would have been acceptable to the people, whom he expected would embrace the first opportunity of declaring in his favour. Yet in this he was disappointed. They cried out all at once, "Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas."

Apostate mortals! a few hours ago ye listened with rapture to his heavenly discourses, beheld with transport the many salutary miracles wrought by this benevolent Son

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

of the Most High, and earnestly importuned him to take possession of the throne and sceptre of David! Now, nothing will satiate your infernal malice but his precious blood! but remember, ye miscreants, ye monsters in human form, that this same Jesus, whom ye beheld with such contempt before the tribunal of the Roman governor; this Jesus, whose blood your infernal mouths so loudly requested; shall one day come in the clouds of heaven to take vengeance on his enemies! And how will ye be able to bear the sight of his appearance, when the very heavens themselves will melt at his presence, "the sun become black as sackcloth of hair," the moon be turned into blood, and the stars fly from their spheres? How will ye then repent of your unjust demand, and call to the mountains and rocks to fall on you, and hide you from the presence of that immaculate Lamb of God, the tremendous Judge of the whole earth!

Pilate himself was astonished at this determination of the multitude, and repeated his question; for he could hardly believe what he had himself heard. But on their again declaring that they desired Barabbas might be released, he asked them what he should do "with Jesus, which is called Christ?" as if he had said, You demanded that Barabbas

should be released; but what shall I then do with Jesus? You cannot surely desire me to crucify him, whom so many of you have acknowledged as your Messiah! "But they cried, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. Then Pilate saith unto them, Why, what evil hath he done? and they cried out the more exceedingly, Crucify him!

They were so resolutely determined to have him destroyed, that notwithstanding the governor urged them again and again to desire his release, declaring his innocence, and offered several times to dismiss him, they would not hear it; uttering their rage, sometimes in hollow, distant, inarticulate murmurs, and sometimes in furious outcries: to such a pitch were their passions raised by the craft and artful insinuations of their priests.

Pilate finding it, therefore, in vain to struggle with their prejudices, called for water, and washed his hands before the multitude; crying out at the same time that the prisoner had no fault, and that he himself was innocent of his blood.

By this action and declaration Pilate seems to have intended to make an impression on the Jewish populace, by complying with the institution of Moses, which orders, in case of an unknown murder, the elders of the nearest city to wash

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

their hands publicly, and say, "Our hands have not shed this blood."—*Deut.* xxi. 7. And, in allusion to this law, the Psalmist says, "I will wash my hands in innocence." According, therefore, to this Jewish rite, Pilate made the most solemn and public declaration of the innocence of our dear Redeemer, and of his resolution of having no hand in his death.

But, notwithstanding the solemnity of this declaration, the Jews continued inflexible, and cried out with one voice, "His blood be on us, and on our children." Dreadful imprecation! it shocks humanity! An imprecation which brought on them the dreadful vengeance of Omnipotence, and is still a heavy burden on that perfidious people!

The governor finding it impossible to alter their choice, released unto them Barabbas. And as it was a general practice of the Romans to scourge those criminals they condemned to be crucified, Pilate ordered the blessed Jesus to be scourged, before he delivered him to the soldiers to be put to death.

The soldiers having scourged Jesus, and received orders to crucify him, carried him into the Pretorium, or common hall, where they added the shame of disgrace to the bitterness of his punishment; for sore as he was by reason of the stripes they

had given him, they dressed him in a purple robe, in derision of his being King of the Jews. Having dressed him in this robe of mock-majesty, they put a reed in his hand instead of a sceptre, and after plating a wreath of thorns, they put it on his head for a crown; forcing it down in so rude a manner that his temples were torn, and his face besmeared with his most precious blood. To the Son of God, in this condition, the rude soldiers bowed the knee, pretending to do it out of respect; but at the same time gave him severe blows on his head, which drove the points of the wreath afresh into his temples, and then spit on him, to express their highest contempt.

The governor, whose office compelled him to be present at this shocking scene of inhumanity, was ready to burst with grief. The sight of an innocent and eminently holy person treated with such shocking barbarity, raised in his breast the most painful sensations of pity. And though he had given sentence that it should be as the Jews desired, and had delivered our dear Redeemer to the soldiers to be crucified, he was in hopes that if he showed him to the people in that condition, they must relent, and earnestly petition for him to be released.



Scourging of Christ

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Filled with this thought, he resolved to carry him out, and exhibit to their view a spectacle capable of softening the most envenomed, obdurate, and enraged enemy. And in order to render the impression still more poignant, he went out himself, and said unto them, Though I have sentenced this man to die, and have scourged him as one that is to be crucified, yet I once more bring him before you, that I may again testify how fully I am persuaded of his innocence; and that ye may yet have an opportunity of saving his life.

As soon as the governor had finished his speech, Jesus appeared on the Pavement, his hair, his face, his shoulders, all clotted with blood, and the purple robe daubed with spittle of the soldiers. And that the sight of Jesus in this distress might make the greater impression on the people, Pilate, while he was coming forward, cried out, "Behold the man!" As if he had said, Will nothing make you relent? Have you lost all the feelings of humanity, and bowels of compassion? Can you bear to see the innocent, a son of Abraham, thus injured?

But all this was to no purpose; the priests, whose rage and malice had extinguished not only the sentiments of justice and feelings of pity natural to the human heart, but

also that love which countrymen bear to each other, no sooner saw Jesus, than they began to fear the fickle populace might relent; and, therefore laying decency aside, they led the way to the multitude, crying out with all their might, Crucify him! crucify him!

Pilate, vexed to see the Jewish rulers thus obstinately bent on the destruction of a person from whom they had nothing to fear that was dangerous, either with regard to their church or state, passionately told them, that if they would have him crucified, they must do it themselves; because he would not suffer his people to murder a man who was guilty of no crime.

But this they also refused, thinking it dishonourable to receive permission to punish a person that had been more than once publicly declared innocent by his judge. Besides, they considered with themselves that the governor might afterwards have called it sedition, as the permission had been extorted from him. Accordingly, they told him that even though none of the things alleged against the prisoner were true, he had committed such a crime in presence of the council itself as by their law deserved the most ignominious death. He had spoken blasphemy, calling himself the Son of God, a title which no

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

mortal could assume, without the highest degree of guilt: "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God."

When Pilate heard that Jesus called himself the Son of God, his fear was increased. Knowing the obstinacy of the Jews in all matters of religion, he was afraid that they would make a tumult in earnest; or perhaps he was himself more afraid than ever to take away his life, because he suspected it might be true. He doubtless remembered the miracles said to have been performed by Jesus, and therefore suspected that he was really the Son of God. For it was well known that the religion which the governor professed directed him to acknowledge the existence of demigods and heroes, or men descended from the gods. Nay, the heathens believed that their gods themselves appeared upon earth in the form of men.

Reflections of this kind induced Pilate to go again to the judgment-hall, and ask Jesus from what father he sprung, and from what country he came? But our blessed Saviour gave him no answer, lest the governor should reverse his sentence, and absolutely refuse to crucify him.

Pilate marvelled greatly at his silence and said unto Jesus, Why dost thou refuse to answer me?

You cannot be ignorant that I am invested with absolute power, either to release or crucify you. To which Jesus answered, I well know that you are Cæsar's servant, and accountable to him for your conduct. I forgive you any injury which, contrary to your inclination, the popular fury constrains you to do unto me. Thou hast thy power "from above," from the emperor: for which cause, the Jewish high-priest who hath put me into thy hands, and, by pretending that I am Cæsar's enemy, forces thee to condemn me; or, if thou refusest, will accuse thee as negligent of the emperor's interest; is more guilty than thou. "He that delivered me unto thee, hath the greater sin."

This sweet and modest answer made such an impression on Pilate, that he went out to the people, and declared his intention of releasing Jesus, whether they gave their consent or not. Upon which the chief priests and rulers of Israel cried out, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king, speaketh against Cæsar." If thou releasest the prisoner, who hath set himself up for a king, and has been accused of endeavouring to raise a rebellion in the country, thou art unfaithful to the interest of the emperor thy master.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

This argument was weighty, and shook Pilate's resolution to the very basis. He was terrified at the thought of being accused to the emperor, who in all his affairs of government, always suspected the worst, and punished the most minute crimes relative thereto with death.

The governor being thus constrained to yield, contrary to his inclination, was very angry with the priests for stirring up the people to such a pitch of madness, and determined to affront them.

He therefore brought Jesus out a second time into the Pavement, wearing the purple robe and the crown of thorns: and pointing to him, said, "Behold your King!" ridiculing their national expectation of a Messiah.

This sarcastical expression stung them to the quick, and they cried out, "Away with him! away with him! crucify him! To which Pilate answered, with the same mocking air, "Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Cæsar." Thus did they publicly renounce their hope of the Messiah, which the whole economy of their religion had been calculated to cherish; they also publicly acknowledged their subjection to the Romans; and, consequently, condemned themselves when they afterwards rebelled against the emperor.

We cannot help observing here, that the great unwillingness of the governor to pass sentence of death upon Jesus, has something in it very remarkable. For, from the character of Pilate, as drawn by the Roman historians themselves, he seems to have been far from possessing any true principle of virtue. To what, then, could it be owing, that so wicked a man should so steadily adhere to the cause of innocence, which he defended with considerable resolution, and perhaps would never have abandoned it had he not been forced by the threatenings of the chief priests and rulers of Israel: and when he did yield, and passed sentence upon our dear Redeemer, why did he still declare him innocent? This can certainly be attributed to no other cause than to the secret but powerful direction of the providence of the Almighty, who intended that, at the same time his Son was condemned and executed as a malefactor, his innocence should be made to appear, in the most public manner and by the most authentic evidence, even that of the judge himself. From the circumstances we have been relating we may learn, that though the Almighty, in the course of his providential government of the world, and for purposes beyond the comprehension of finite mortals, suffers the most virtuous characters

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

he exposed, not only to the insults, but the cruelty, of the most abandoned of mankind; yet he will certainly at a future period vindicate the cause of innocence, and strike the guilty with horror and remorse for their impious conduct.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

The innocent and immaculate Redeemer is led forth to Mount Calvary, and there ignominiously crucified between two notorious Malefactors—Reviled by the Spectators—A Phenomenon appears on the important occasion—Our Lord addresses his Friends from the Cross, and gives up the ghost.

THE solemn, the awful, period now approached, when the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world, was to undergo the oppressive burden of our sins, upon the tree, and submit unto death, even the death of the cross, that we might live at the right hand of God for ever and ever.

Sentence being pronounced upon the blessed Jesus, the soldiers were ordered to prepare for his execution, a command which they readily obeyed; and after clothing him in his own garments, led him away to crucify him. It is not said that they took the crown of thorns from his temples; probably he died wearing it, that the title placed over his head might be the better understood.

It is not to be expected that the ministers of Jewish malice remitted

any of the circumstances of affliction which were ever laid on persons condemned to be crucified. Accordingly, Jesus was obliged to walk on foot to the place of execution, bearing his cross. But the fatigue of the preceding night, spent without sleep; the sufferings he had undergone in the garden; his having been hurried from place to place, and obliged to stand the whole time of his trial; the want of food, and the loss of blood he had sustained, and not his want of courage on this occasion; made him faint under the burden of his cross. The soldiers, seeing him unable to bear the weight laid it on one Simon, a native of Cyrene, in Egypt, the father of Alexander and Rufus, well known amongst the first Christians, and forced him to bear it after the great Redeemer of mankind. The soldiers did not, however, do this out of compassion to the sufferings of Jesus, but to prevent his dying with the fatigue, and by that means elude his punishment.

The blessed Jesus, in his journey to Calvary, was followed by an innumerable multitude of people, particularly of women, who lamented bitterly the severity of his sentence, and showed all the tokens of sincere compassion and grief. Jesus, who always felt the woes of others more than he did his own, forgetting his

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

distress at the very time when it lay heaviest upon him, turned himself about, and, with a benevolence and tenderness truly divine, said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me; but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming in which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs which never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?"—*Luke xxiii. 28, &c.* As if he had said, Dry up these tears, ye daughters of Jerusalem, which ye shed in compassion to me, and reserve them for the deplorable fate of yourselves and of your children: for the calamities that will soon fall upon you and your offspring are truly terrible, and call for the bitterest lamentations. In those days of vengeance you will passionately wish that you had not given birth to a generation whose wickedness has rendered them the objects of the wrath of the Almighty, to such a degree as never was before experienced in the world. Then shall they wish to be crushed under the weight of enormous mountains, and concealed from their enemies in the bowels of the hills. The thoughts of these calamities afflict my soul

far more than the feeling of my own sufferings, For if the Romans are permitted to inflict such punishments on me, who am innocent, how dreadful must the vengeance be which they shall inflict on a nation whose sins cry aloud to heaven, hastening the pace of the divine judgments, and rendering the perpetrators as proper for punishment as dry wood is for the flames.

Being arrived at the place of execution, which was called Golgotha, or the Place of Skulls, from the criminals' bones which lay scattered there, some of our Redeemer's friends offered him a stupifying potion, to render him insensible to the ignominy and excruciating pain of his punishment. But as soon as he tasted the potion, he refused to drink it, being determined to bear his sufferings, however sharp, not by intoxicating and stupifying himself, but by the strength of patience, fortitude, and faith.

Jesus having refused the potion, the soldiers began to execute their orders, by stripping him quite naked, and in that condition began to fasten him to his cross. But while they were piercing his hands and his feet with nails, instead of crying out through the sharpness of the pain, he calmly, through fervently, prayed for them, and for all those who had any hand in his death; beseeching

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

his heavenly Father to forgive them, and excusing them himself by the only circumstance that could alleviate their guilt; I mean, their ignorance. "Father," said the compassionate Redeemer of mankind, "forgive them; for they know not what they do. This was infinite meekness and goodness, truly worthy of the only begotten Son of God; an example of forgiveness, which, though it can never be equalled by any, should be imitated by all.

But, behold, the appointed soldiers dig the hole in which the cross was to be erected!—the cross is fixed in the ground—the blessed Jesus lies on the bed of sorrows—they nail him to it—his nerves break—his blood distils—he hangs upon his wounds, naked—a spectacle to heaven and earth!

Thus was the only begotten Son of God, who came down from heaven to save the world, crucified by his own creatures; and, to render the ignominy still greater, placed between two thieves! "Hear, O heavens! O earth, earth, earth hear! The Lord hath nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against him."

It was usual for the crimes committed by malefactors to be written in black on a white board, and placed over their head on the cross. In conformity to this custom,

Pilate wrote a title in the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin languages, that all foreigners, as well as natives, might be able to read it, and fastened it to the cross, over the head of Jesus; and the inscription was "This is the king of the Jews." But when the chief priests and the elders had read this title, they were greatly displeased; because, as it represented the crime for which Jesus was condemned, it insinuated that he had been acknowledged for the Messiah. Besides, being placed over the head of one who was dying by the most infamous punishment, it implied that all who attempted to deliver the Jews should perish in the same manner. The faith and hope of the nation, therefore, being thus publicly ridiculed, it is no wonder that the priests thought themselves affronted; and accordingly came to Pilate, begging that the writing might be altered. But, as he had intended the affront in revenge for their forcing him to crucify Jesus, contrary both to his judgment and inclination, he refused to grant their request: "What I have written," said he, "I have written."

When the soldiers had nailed the blessed Jesus to the cross, and erected it, they divided his garments among them. But his coat, or vesture, being without seam, woven from the top throughout, they

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

agreed not to rend it, but to cast lots for it ; by which the prediction of the prophet concerning the death and sufferings of the Messiah was fulfilled. "They parted my garments among them, and for my vesture did they cast lots." A sufficient indication that every circumstance of the death and passion of the blessed Jesus was perfectly known long before in the court of heaven ; and accordingly his being crucified between two malefactors was expressly foretold—"And he was numbered with the transgressors."—*Isa.* liii. 12.

The common people, "of the baser sort," whom the vile priests had incensed against the blessed Jesus, by the malicious falsehoods they had spread concerning him, and which they pretended to found on the deposition of witnesses ; the common people, I say, seeing him hang in so infamous a manner upon the cross, and reading the inscription that was placed over his head, expressed their indignation at him by sarcastical expressions. "Ah, thou," said they, "that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself, and come down from the cross."

But the common people were not the only persons who mocked and derided the blessed Jesus, while he was suffering to obtain the remission

of sins for all mankind. The rulers, who now imagined they had effectually destroyed his pretensions to the character of the Messiah, joined the populace in ridiculing him, and, with a meanness of soul which many infamous wretches would have scorned, mocked him, even while he was struggling with the agonies of death. They scoffed at the miracles by which he demonstrated himself to be the Messiah, and promised to believe on him, on condition of his proving his pretensions by descending from the cross. "He saved others," said they, "himself he cannot save : if he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe on him."

In the meantime, nothing could be more false and hypocritical than this pretension of the stiff-necked Jews ; for they afterwards continued in their unbelief, notwithstanding they well knew that he raised himself from the dead, a much greater miracle than his coming down from the cross would have been ; a miracle attested by witnesses whose veracity they could not call in question. It was told them by the soldiers whom they themselves placed at the sepulchre to watch the body, and who they were obliged to bribe largely to conceal the truth. It is, therefore, abundantly evident that if

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

the blessed Jesus had descended from the cross, the Jewish priests would have continued in their infidelity ; and, consequently, that their declaration was made with no other intention than to insult the Redeemer of mankind, thinking it impossible for him now to escape out of their hands.

The soldiers also joined in this general scene of mockery : “ If thou be the King of the Jews,” said they, “ save thyself.” If thou art the great Messiah expected by the Jews, descend from the cross by miracle, and deliver thyself from these excruciating torments.

Nor did even one of the thieves forbear mocking the great Lord of heaven and earth, though labouring himself under the most racking pains, and struggling with the agonies of death. But the other exercised a most extraordinary faith, at a time when our great Redeemer was in the highest affliction, mocked by men, and hanged upon the cross, as the most ignominious of malefactors. This Jewish criminal seems to have entertained a more rational and exalted notion of the Messiah’s kingdom than even the disciples themselves. They expected nothing but a secular empire : he gave strong intimations of his having an idea of Christ’s spiritual dominion ; for at the very time when Jesus was dying

on the cross, he begged to be remembered by him when he came into his kingdom. “ Lord,” said he, “ remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” Nor did he make this request in vain : the great Redeemer of mankind answered him, “ Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.”

But let us attentively consider the history of our blessed Saviour’s passion, as it offers to our view events absolutely astonishing. For when we remember the perfect innocence of our great Redeemer, the uncommon love he bore to the children of men, and the many kind and benevolent offices he did for the sons and daughters of affliction ; when we reflect on the esteem in which he was held all along by the common people, how cheerfully they followed him to the remotest corners of the country, nay, even into the desolate retreats of the wilderness, and with what pleasure they listened to his discourses ; when we consider these particulars, I say, we cannot help being astonished to find them at the conclusion rushing all of a sudden into the opposite extreme, and every individual, as it were, combined to treat him with the most barbarous cruelty.

When Pilate asked the people, if they desired to have Jesus released,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

his disciples, though they were very numerous, and might have made a great appearance in his behalf, remained absolutely silent, as if they had been speechless or infatuated. The Roman soldiers, notwithstanding their general had declared him innocent, insulted him in the most inhuman manner. The Scribes and Pharisees ridiculed him. The common people, who had received him with hosannas a few days before, mocked him as they passed by, and railed at him as a deceiver. Nay, the very thief on the cross reviled him.

This sudden revolution in the humour of the whole nation may seem unaccountable. But if we could assign a proper reason for the silence of the disciples, the principles which influenced the rest might be discovered in their several speeches. The followers of the blessed Jesus had attached themselves to him in expectation of being raised to great wealth and power in his kingdom, which they expected would have been established long before this time. But seeing no appearance at all of what they had so long hoped for, they permitted him to be condemned, perhaps because they thought it would have obliged him to break the Roman yoke by a miracle.

With respect to the soldiers, they

were angry that any one should pretend to royalty in Judea, where Cæsar had established his authority. Hence they insulted our blessed Saviour with the title of king, and paid him, in mockery, the honours of a sovereign.

As for the common people, they seem to have lost their opinion of him, probably, because he had neither convinced the council, nor rescued himself when they condemned him. They began, therefore, to consider the assertion of his destroying the temple, and building it in three days, as a kind of blasphemy, because it required a divine power to execute such an undertaking.

The priests and scribes were filled with the most implacable and diabolical malice against him; because he had torn off their mask of hypocrisy, and showed them to the people in their true colours. It is therefore no wonder that they ridiculed his miracles, from whence he derived his reputation.

In short, the thief also fancied that he might have delivered both himself and them, if he had been the Messiah; but as no such deliverance appeared, he upbraided him for making pretensions to that high character.

But now, my soul, take one view of thy dying Saviour, breathing out

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

his spirit on the cross ! Behold his unspotted flesh lacerated with stripes by which thou art healed ! See his hands extended and nailed to the cross, those beneficent hands which were incessantly stretched out to unloose thy heavy burdens, and to impart blessings of every kind ! Behold his feet riveted to the accursed tree with nails ! those feet which always went about doing good, and travelled far and near to spread the glad tidings of everlasting salvation ! View his tender temples encircled with a wreath of thorns, which shoot their keen afflicting points into his blessed head ; that head which was ever meditating peace to poor lost and undone sinners, and spent many a wakeful night in ardent prayer for their happiness ! See him labouring in the agonies of death ! breathing out his soul into the hands of his Almighty Father, and praying for his cruel enemies ! Was ever love like this ? was ever benevolence so gloriously displayed ?

Oh, my soul, put thy trust in that bleeding, that dying Saviour ! Then, though the pestilence walketh in darkness, and the sickness destroyeth at noonday ; though thousands fall beside thee, and ten thousands at thy right hand ; thou needest not fear the approach of any evil ! Either the destroying angel shall

pass over thee, or dispense the corrections of a friend, not the scourges of an enemy, which, instead of hurting, will work for thy good. Then though profaneness and infidelity (far more malignant evils) breathe their contagion, and taint multitudes around thee, thou shalt be safely hid in the hollow of his hand, and preserved in every danger.

Come, then, my soul and take sanctuary under that tree of life, the ignominious cross of thy bleeding Saviour : fly for safety to that city of refuge opened in his bleeding wounds. These will prove a sacred hiding-place, not to be pierced by the flames of divine wrath, or the fiery darts of temptations. His dying merits, his perfect obedience, will be “as rivers of water in a dry place,” or “as the shadow of a great rock in a dreary land.”

But particularly in that last tremendous day, when the heavens shall be rent asunder, and be wrapt up like a scroll ; when his almighty arm shall arrest the sun in his career, and dash the structure of the universe to pieces ; when the dead, both small and great, shall be gathered before the throne of his glory, and the fates of all mankind hang on the very point of a final irreversible decision ; then, if thou hast faithfully trusted in him, and made his precepts thy constant

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

directors, thou shalt be owned and defended by him. O! reader, may both thou that perusest, and him who hath written this for thy soul's advantage, be covered, at that unutterably important conjuncture, by the wings of his redeeming love; then shall we behold all the horrible convulsions of expiring nature with composure, with comfort! we shall even welcome the consummation of all things, as "the times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord."

But see the sun, that glorious luminary of heaven, hides as it were his face from this detestable action of morals, and is wrapt in the pitchy mantle of chaotic darkness! This preternatural eclipse of the sun continued for three hours, to the great terror and astonishment of the people present at the crucifixion of our dear Redeemer. And surely nothing could be more proper than this extraordinary alteration in the face of nature, while the Sun of Righteousness was withdrawing his beams, not only from the promised land, but from the whole world; for it was at once a miraculous testimony, given by the Almighty himself, to the innocence of his Son, and a proper emblem of the departure of him who was the light of the world, at least till his luminous rays, like the beams of the morning, shone out anew with additional

splendour in the ministry of his apostles.

Nor was the darkness which now covered Judea and the neighbouring countries, beginning about noon and continuing till Jesus expired, the effect of an ordinary eclipse of the sun. It is well known that this phenomenon can only happen at the change of the moon; whereas the Jewish passover, at which our great Redeemer suffered, was always celebrated at the full. Besides, the total darkness of an eclipse of the sun never exceeds twelve or fifteen minutes; whereas this continued full three hours. Nothing, therefore, but the immediate hand of that almighty Being who placed the sun in the centre of the planetary system, could have produced this astonishing darkness. Nothing but Omnipotence, who first lighted this glorious luminary of heaven, could have deprived it of its cheering rays. Now, ye scoffers of Israel, whose blood ye have so earnestly desired, and wished it might fall upon you and your children, behold, all nature is dressed in the sable veil of sorrow, and, in a language that cannot be mistaken, mourns the departure of its Lord and Master; weeps for your crimes, and deprecates the vengeance of heaven upon your guilty heads! Happy for you that this suffering Jesus is compassion

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

itself, and even in the agonies of death prays to his heavenly Father to avert from you the stroke of his justice.

This preternatural eclipse of the sun was considered as a miracle by the heathens themselves; and one of them cried out, "Either the world is at an end, or the God of nature suffers." And well might he use the expression; for never since this planetary system was called from its primitive chaos, was known such a deprivation of light in the glorious luminary of day. Indeed, when the Almighty punished Pharoah for refusing to let the children of Israel depart out of his land, the sable veil of darkness was for three days drawn over Egypt. But this darkness was confined to a part of that kingdom; whereas this that happened at our Saviour's crucifixion was universal.

When the darkness began, the disciples naturally considered it as a prelude to the deliverance of their Master. For though the chief priests, elders, and people, had sarcastically desired him to descend from the accursed tree; his friends could not but be persuaded, that he who had delivered so many from incurable diseases, who had restored limbs to the maimed, and eyes to the blind, who had given speech to the dumb, and called the dead from

the chambers of the dust, might easily save himself, even from the cross.

When, therefore, his mother, his mother's sister, Mary Magdalene, and the beloved disciple, observed the veil of darkness begin to extend over the face of nature, they drew near to the foot of the cross, probably in expectation that the Son of God was going to shake the frame of the universe, unloose himself from the cross, and take ample vengeance on his cruel and perfidious enemies.

The blessed Jesus was now in the midst of his sufferings. Yet when he saw his mother and her companions, their grief greatly affected his tender breast, especially the distress of his mother. The agonies of death, under which he was now labouring, could not prevent his expressing the most affectionate regard, both for her and for them. For, that she might have some consolation to support her under the greatness of her sorrows, he told her the disciple whom he loved would, for the sake of that love, supply his place to her after he was taken from them, even the place of a son; and, therefore, he desired her to consider him as such, and expect from him all the duties of a child. "Woman," said he, "behold thy son."

Nor was this remarkable token of

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

filial affection towards his mother the only instance the dying Jesus gave of his sincere love to his friends and followers; the beloved disciple had also a token of his high esteem. He singled him out as the only person among his friends to supply his place with regard to his mother. Accordingly he desired him expressly to reverence her in the same manner as if she had been his own parent: a duty which the favourite disciple gladly undertook, carried her with him to his house, and maintained her from that hour to the day of her death; her husband Joseph having, it seems, been dead some time.

Thus in the midst of the heaviest sufferings that human nature ever sustained, the blessed Jesus demonstrated a divine strength of benevolence. Even at the time when his own distress was at the highest pitch, and nature was dressed in the robe of mourning for the sufferings of the Redeemer of mankind, his friends had so large a share of his concern, that their happiness interrupted the sharpness of his pains, and for a short time engrossed his thoughts.

But now the moment when he should resign his soul into the hands of his heavenly Father approached, and he repeated part, at least, of the twenty-second psalm, uttering with a loud voice these remarkable words,

“Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

Some believe that our blessed Saviour repeated the whole psalm; it having been the custom of the Jews, in making quotations, to mention only the first words of the psalm or section which they cited. If so, as this psalm contains the most remarkable particulars of our dear Redeemer’s passion, being as it were a summary of the prophecies relative to that subject, by repeating it on the cross the blessed Jesus signified that he was now accomplishing the things that were predicted concerning the Messiah. And as this psalm is composed in the form of a prayer, by pronouncing it at this time he also claimed of his Father the performance of all the promises he had made, whether to him or to his people.

Some of the people who stood by, when they heard our blessed Saviour pronounce the first words of the psalm, misunderstood him, probably from their not hearing him distinctly, and concluded that he called for Elias. Upon which one of them filled a sponge with vinegar, put it on a reed, and gave him to drink; being desirous to keep him alive as long as possible, to see whether Elias would come to take him down from the cross.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

But as soon as Jesus had tasted the vinegar, he said, "It is finished." That is, the work of man's redemption is accomplished; the great work which the only begotten Son of God came into the world to perform, is finished.

In speaking these words, he cried with an exceeding loud voice; and afterwards addressed his Almighty Father, in words which form the best pattern of a recommendatory prayer at the hour of death: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." And having uttered these words, "he bowed his head, and yielded up the ghost."

But, behold, at the very instant that the blessed Jesus resigned his soul into the hands of his heavenly Father, the veil of the temple was miraculously rent from the top to the bottom; probably in the presence of the priest who burnt incense in the holy place, and who, doubtless, published the account when he came out: for our blessed Saviour expired at the ninth hour, the very time of offering the evening sacrifice.

Nor was this the only miracle that happened at the death of the great Messiah; the earth trembled from its very foundations, the flinty rocks burst asunder, and the sepulchres hewn in them were opened, and many bodies of saints deposited there awakened after his resurrec-

tion from the sleep of death, left the gloomy chambers of the tomb, went into the city of Jerusalem, and appeared unto many.

And as the rending the veil of the temple intimated that the entrance into the holy place, the type of heaven, was now laid open to all nations; so the resurrection of a number of saints from the dead demonstrated that the power of death and the grave was broken; the sting was taken from death, and the victory wrested from the grave. In short, our dear Redeemer's conquests over the enemies of mankind were shown to be complete; and an earnest was given of the general resurrection of the dead.

Nor did the remarkable particulars which attended that awful period, when Jesus gave up the ghost, affect the natives of Judea only. The Roman centurion who was placed near the cross, to prevent disorders of any kind, glorified the Almighty, and cried out, "Truly this was the Son of God!" And others who were with them, when they beheld heaven itself bearing witness to the truth of our great Redeemer's mission, smote their breasts and retired.

They had been incessant with loud voices to have him crucified; but when they saw the face of the creation wrapt in the gloomy mantle of



The Dead Christ.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

darkness during his crucifixion, and found his death accompanied with an earthquake, as if nature had been in an agony when he died, they rightly interpreted these prodigies to be so many testimonies from the Almighty of his innocence; and their passions, which had been inflamed and exasperated against him, became quite calm, or exerted in his behalf. Some were angry with themselves for neglecting the opportunity the governor gave them of saving his life. Some were stung with remorse for having been active in procuring Pilate to condemn him, and even offering him the most bitter insults while he laboured under the most cruel sufferings. And others were deeply affected at beholding the pains he suffered, which were rigorously severe.

These various passions being visibly painted in their countenances, afforded a melancholy spectacle; many of the multitude returning from the place of execution with their eyes fixed upon the earth, pensive and silent; their hearts ready to burst with grief, groaning deeply within themselves, shedding floods of tears, and smiting on their breasts.

The grief they now felt for the blessed Jesus was distinguished from their former rage against him by this remarkable particular, that their rage was entirely owing to the artful in-

sinuations of the priests; whereas their grief was genuine, and the natural feelings of their own hearts, greatly affected with the truth and innocence of him who was the object of their commiseration. And as flattery had no share in this mourning, so the expression of their sorrow were such as became a real and unfeigned passion.

Thus were demonstrated, by many awful tokens, the truth, the divinity, the power, of our Redeemer's mission: and the blind, the obdurate Jews, were struck with horror, fully convinced that the person whom they had cruelly put to death, was no other than the Son of God, the promised Messiah, the Saviour of the world.

CHAPTER XL.

The blessed Jesus is treated with Indignity after his Crucifixion—A pious Person begs his Body of Pilate in order for Interment.

IT was expressly forbidden by the law of Moses, that the bodies of those who were hanged should remain all night on the tree. In conformity to this law, and because the Sabbath was at hand, the Jews begged the governor that the legs of the three persons crucified might be broken, to hasten their death. To this request Pilate readily consented;

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

and accordingly gave the necessary order to the soldiers to put it in execution.

But on perceiving that Jesus was already dead, the soldiers did not give themselves the trouble of breaking his legs, as they had done those of the two malefactors who were crucified with him. One of them, however, either out of wantonness or cruelty, thrust a spear into his side, and out of the wound flowed blood and water.

This wound, therefore, was of the greatest importance to mankind, as it abundantly demonstrated the truth of our Saviour's death, and consequently prevented all objections that the enemies to our holy faith would otherwise have raised against it. The evangelist adds, that the legs of our great Redeemer were not broken but his side pierced, that two particular prophecies might be fulfilled: "A bone of him shall not be broken;" and, "They shall look on him whom they have pierced."

Among the disciples of our blessed Jesus, was one called Joseph, of Arimathea; a person equally remarkable for his birth, fortune, and office. This man, who was not to be intimidated by the malice of his countrymen, went boldly to Pilate, and begged the body of his great Master. He had, indeed, nothing to fear from the Roman governor,

who, during the whole course of our Saviour's trial, had shown the greatest inclination to release him; but he had reason to apprehend that this action might draw upon him the malice of the rulers of the Jews; who had taken such great pains to get the Messiah crucified.

However, the great regard he had for the remains of his Master made him despise the malice of the Jews; being persuaded that Omnipotence would defend him, and cover his enemies with shame and confusion. And he well knew, that if no friend procured a grant of the body, it would be ignominiously cast out among the executed malefactors.

Pilate was at first surprised at the request of Joseph, thinking it highly improbable that he should be dead in so short a time. He had, indeed, given orders for the soldiers to break the legs of the crucified persons; but he knew it was common for them to live many hours after that operation was performed: for though the pain they felt must be exquisite to the last degree, yet as the vital parts remained untouched, life would continue some time in the miserable body.

The governor, therefore, called the centurion, to know the truth of what Joseph had told him; and being convinced, from the answer of that officer, that Jesus had been

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

dead some time, he readily gave the body to Joseph.

This worthy counsellor having obtained his request, repaired to mount Calvary; and, being assisted by Nicodemus, took the body down from the cross. The latter was formerly so cautious in visiting Jesus, that he came to him by night. But in paying the last duties to his Master, he used no art to conceal his design. He showed a courage far superior to that of any of his apostles, not only assisting Joseph in taking down the body of Jesus from the cross, but bringing with him a quantity of spices necessary in the burial of his Saviour.

Accordingly they wrapt the body with the spices in fine linen, and laid it in a new sepulchre, which Joseph had hewn out of a rock for himself. The sepulchre was situated in a garden near mount Calvary; and in which having carefully deposited the body of the blessed Jesus, they fastened the door, by rolling to it a very large stone. "And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed."—*Matt.* xxvii. 59, 60.

Oh! what a wonderful spectacle was now exhibited in this memorable

sepulchre! He who clothes himself with light as with a garment, and walks upon the wings of the wind, was pleased to wear the habiliments of mortality, and dwell amongst the prostrate dead! Who can repeat the wondrous truth too often? Who can dwell upon the enchanting theme too long? He who sits enthroned in glory, and diffuses bliss amongst the heavenly host, was once a pale and bloody corpse, and pressed the floor of this little sepulchre!

O Death! how great was thy triumph in that hour! never did thy gloomy realms contain such a prisoner before. Prisoner, did I say? No, he was more than conqueror. He arose far more mighty than Samson from a transient slumber; broke down the gates, and demolished the strong holds of those dark dominions. And this, O mortals, is your consolation and security. Jesus hath trod the dreadful path, and smoothed it for your passage. Jesus, sleeping in the chambers of the tomb, hath brightened the dismal mansion, and left an inviting odour in those beds of dust. The dying Jesus is your sure protection, your unquestionable passport through the territories of the grave. Believe in him, and they shall prove a "high-way to Sion;" shall transmit you safe to paradise. Believe in him,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

and you shall be no losers, but unspeakable gainers, by your dissolution. For hear what the Oracle of heaven says on this important point: "Whoso believeth in me shall never die." Death shall no longer be inflicted as a punishment, but rather vouchsafed as a blessing. The exit of saints is the end of their frailty, and their entrance upon perfection; their last groan is the prelude to life and immortality.

But to return. The women of Galilee, who had watched their dear Redeemer in his last moments, and accompanied his body to the sepulchre, observing that the funeral rites were performed in a hurry, agreed among themselves, as soon as the Sabbath was passed, to return to the sepulchre, and embalm the body of their dead Saviour, by anointing and swathing him in the manner then common among the Jews. Accordingly they retired to the city, and purchased the spices necessary for that purpose; Nicodemus having furnished only a mixture of myrrh and aloes.

During these transactions, the chief priests and Pharisees, remembering that Jesus had more than once predicted his own resurrection, came to the governor, and informed him of it; begging, at the same time, that a guard might be placed at the sepulchre, lest his disciples

should carry away the body, and affirm that he was risen from the dead. This happened a little before it was dark in the evening, called "the next day that followed," by the evangelist, because the Jewish day began at sunset.

This request being thought reasonable by Pilate, he gave them leave to take as many soldiers as they pleased out of the cohort which at the feast came from the castle of Antonia, and kept guard of the porticos of the temple. For that they were not Jewish but Roman soldiers whom the priests employed to watch the sepulchre, is evident from their asking them of the governor. Besides, when the soldiers returned with the news of our Saviour's resurrection, the priests desired them to report that his disciples had stolen him away while they slept; and, to encourage them to tell the falsehood boldly, promised, that if their neglect of duty came to the governor's ears, proper methods should be used to pacify him, and deliver them from any punishment; a promise which there was no need of making to their own servants.

The priests having thus obtained a guard of Roman soldiers, men long accustomed to military duties, and therefore the most proper for watching the body, set out with



C. Landolt

The Women of Galilee.

J. C. Bulfinch

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

them to the sepulchre; and to prevent these guards from combining with the disciples in carrying on any fraud, placed them at their post, and sealed the stone which was rolled to the door of the sepulchre.

Thus what was designed to expose the mission and doctrines of Jesus as rank falsehood and vile imposture, proved in fact the strongest confirmation of the truth and divinity of the same that could possibly be given; and placed what they wanted to refute (which was his resurrection from the dead) even beyond a doubt.

CHAPTER XLI.

Two pious Women go to view the Sepulchre of their crucified Lord and Saviour—An awful Phenomenon happens—A ministering Spirit descends—The Redeemer bursts the chains of Death, and rises from the Tomb.

VERY early in the morning after the Sabbath, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to visit the sepulchre, in order to embalm our Lord's body; for the performance of which they had, in concert with several other women from Galilee, brought ointments and spices. But before they reached the sepulchre, there was a great earthquake, preceding the most memorable event that ever hap-

pened among the children of men, the resurrection of the Son of God from the dead. "For the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door of the sepulchre, and sat upon it: his countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men:" they fled into the city, and the Saviour of the world rose from the dead.

The angel, who had till then sat upon the stone, quitted his station, and entered into the sepulchre. In the meantime, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were still on their way to the place, together with Salome, who joined them on the road. As they proceeded on their way, they consulted among themselves, with regard to the method of putting their design of embalming the body of their Master in execution; particularly with respect to the enormous stone which they had seen placed there, with the utmost difficulty, two days before. "Who," said they, "shall roll away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? For it was very great." But in the midst of this deliberation about removing this great and sole obstacle to their design (for it does not appear they knew anything of the guard), they lifted up their eyes,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

and perceived it was already rolled away.

Alarmed at so extraordinary and unexpected a circumstance, Mary Magdalene concluded that the stone could not have been rolled away without some design; and that those who rolled it away could have no other intent than that of removing our Lord's body. Imagining by appearances that they had really done so, she ran immediately to acquaint Peter and John of what she had seen, and what she suspected; leaving Mary and Salome there, that if the other women should arrive during her absence, they might acquaint them with their surprise at finding the stone removed, and of Mary Magdalene's running to inform the apostles of it.

In the meantime, the soldiers, who were terrified at seeing an awful messenger from on high roll away the stone from the door of the sepulchre, and open it in quality of a servant, fled into the city, and informed the Jewish rulers of these miraculous appearances. This account was highly mortifying to the chief priests, as it was a proof of our Saviour's resurrection that could not be denied: they therefore resolved to stifle it immediately; and accordingly bribed the soldiers to conceal the real fact, and to publish every-

where that his disciples had stolen the body out of the sepulchre.

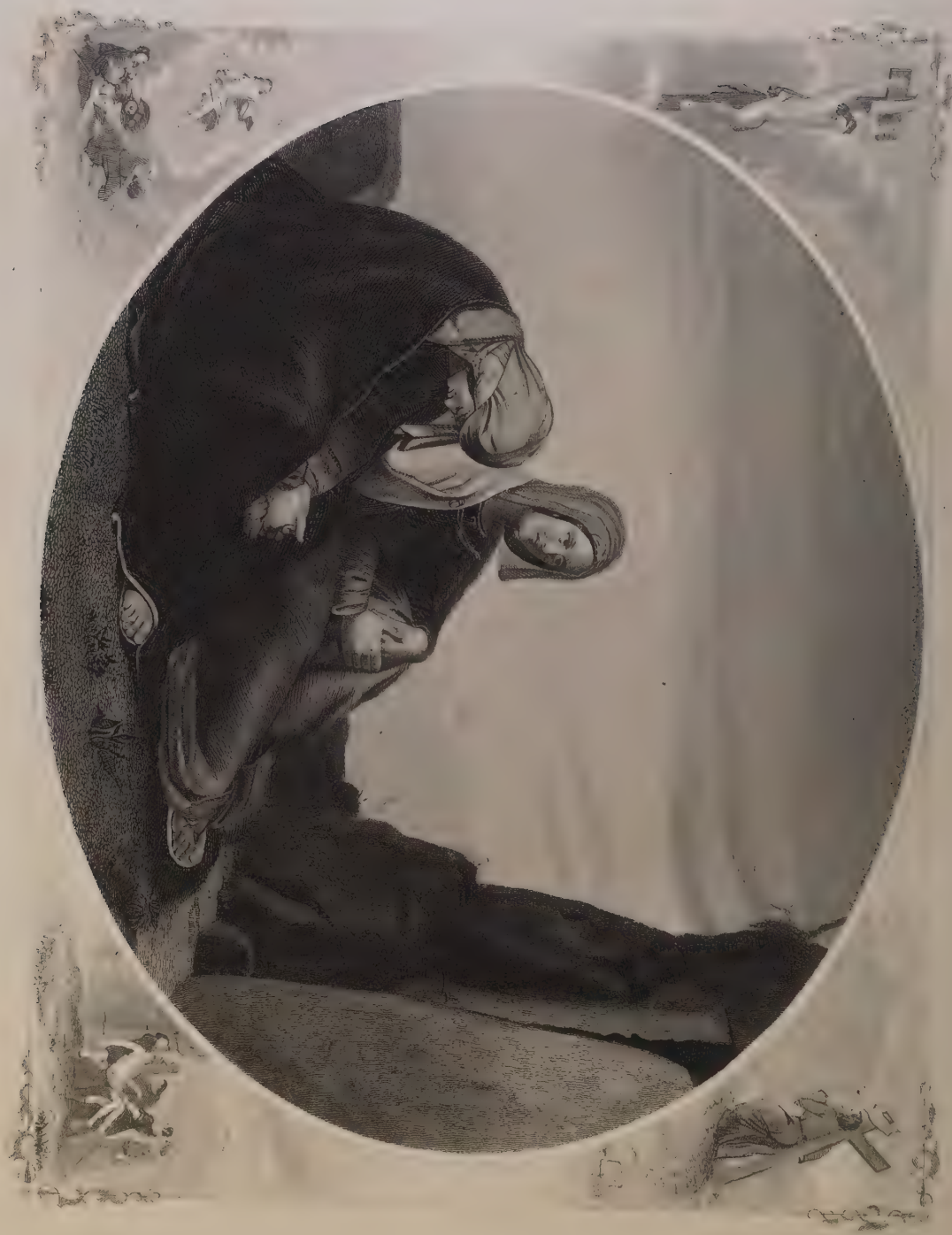
What! the body taken away while the place was guarded by Roman soldiers? Yes, according to these wise priests, the disciples stole the body while the soldiers slept! A story so inconsistent, and which so evidently carries the marks of its own confutation with it, that it deserves no answer.

The priests themselves could not be so stupid as not to foresee what construction the world would put upon the account, given by persons who pretended to know and tell what was done while they were asleep.

CHAPTER XLII.

The Angel addresses the pious Women—Two Disciples go to the Sepulchre—Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene—Afterwards to a company of Women—Peter meets his Lord and Master after his Resurrection.

WHILE Mary Magdalene was going to inform the disciples that the stone was rolled away from the mouth of the sepulchre, and the body taken away, Mary and Salome continued advancing towards the place, and at their arrival found, what they expected, the body of their beloved Master gone from the sepulchre, where it had been depo-



Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

sited by Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea; but at the same time beheld, to their great astonishment, a beautiful young man, in shining raiment, very glorious to behold, sitting on the right side of the sepulchre.

Matthew tells us that it was the angel who had rolled away the stone, and frightened away the guards from the sepulchre. It seems he had now laid aside the terrors in which he was then arrayed; and assumed the form and dress of a human being, in order that these pious women, who had accompanied our Saviour during the greatest part of the time of his public ministry, might be as little terrified as possible.

But notwithstanding his beauty and benign appearance, they were greatly affrighted, and on the point of turning back, when the heavenly messenger, to banish their fears, told them in a gentle accent, that he knew their errand. "Fear not," said he, "for I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified; he is not here; for he is risen, as he said:" and then invited them to come down into the sepulchre, and view the place where the Son of God had lain; that is, to look on the linen clothes, and the napkin that had been about his head, and which he had left behind him when

he arose from the dead: for to look at the place in any other view would not have tended to confirm their faith of his resurrection.

The women, greatly encouraged by the agreeable news, as well as by the peculiar accent with which this blessed messenger from the heavenly Canaan delivered his speech, went down into the sepulchre, when, behold! another of the angelic choir appeared.

They did not, however, yet seem to give sufficient credit to what was told them by the angel; and, therefore, the other gently reproved them for seeking the living among the dead, with an intention to do him an office due only to the latter, and for not believing what was told them by a messenger from heaven, or rather, for not remembering the words which their great Master himself had told them with regard to his own resurrection. "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again."

When the women had satisfied their minds by looking at the place where the Lord had lain, and where nothing was to be found but the linen clothes, the angel who first

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

appeared to them resumed the discourse, and bade them to go and tell his disciples, particularly Peter, the glad tidings of his Master's resurrection from the dead; that he was going before them to Galilee, and that they should there have the pleasure of seeing him.

The reason why the disciples were ordered to go into Galilee to meet their great and beloved Master, seems to be this: they were now most of them in Jerusalem, celebrating the passover; and it may be easily imagined that, on receiving the news of their Lord's resurrection, many, if not all, would resolve to tarry in Jerusalem, in expectation of meeting him there: a thing that must have proved of great detriment to them at that time of the year, when the harvest was about to begin, the sheaf of first-fruits being always offered on the second day of the passover week.

In order, therefore, to prevent their staying so long from home, the message was sent directing them to return into Galilee, with full assurance that they should there have the pleasure of seeing their great Lord and Master; and by that means have all their doubts removed, and be fully convinced that he had patiently undergone all his sufferings for the sins of mankind.

The women, highly elated with

the news of their Lord's resurrection, left the sepulchre immediately, and ran to carry the disciples the glad tidings.

During these transactions at the sepulchre, Peter and John, having been informed by Mary Magdalene that the stone was rolled away, and the body of Jesus not to be found, were hastening to the grave, and missed the women who had seen the appearance of angels.

The disciples being astonished at what Mary Magdalene had told them, and desirous of having their doubts cleared up, made all the haste possible to the sepulchre; and John, being younger than Peter, arrived at the place first, but did not go in, contenting himself with stooping down, and seeing the linen clothes lying, which had been wrapped about our Saviour's body. Peter soon arrived, and went to the sepulchre, where he saw the "linen clothes, and the napkin that was about his head not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself."

Our Lord left the grave-clothes in the sepulchre, probably to show that his body was not stolen away by his disciples, who in such a case would not have taken time to have stripped it. Besides, the circumstances of the grave-clothes induced the disciples themselves to



Christ appearing to Mary

John. Ch. XX. v. 16.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

believe, when the resurrection was related to them. But at that time they had not any suspicion that he was risen from the dead.

These two disciples having thus satisfied themselves that what Mary Magdalene had told them was really true, returned to their respective habitations; but Mary, who had returned, continued weeping at the door of the sepulchre. She had, it seems, followed Peter and John to the garden, but did not leave it with them, being anxious to find the body. Accordingly, stepping down into the place to examine it once more, she saw two angels sitting, the one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. They were now in the same position as when they appeared to the other women; but had rendered themselves invisible while Peter and John were at the sepulchre.

Mary, on beholding these heavenly messengers dressed in the robes of light, was greatly terrified. But they, in the most endearing accent, asked her, "Woman, why weepest thou?" To which she answered, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." On pronouncing these words she turned herself about, and saw Jesus standing near her; but the terror she was

in, and the garments in which he was now dressed, prevented her from knowing him for some time. Jesus repeated the same question used before by the angel, "Woman, why weepest thou?" To which Mary, who now supposed him to be the gardener, answered, Sir, if his body be troublesome in the sepulchre, and thou hast removed him, tell me where he is deposited, and I will take him away. But our blessed Saviour, willing to remove her anxiety, called her by her name, with his usual tone of voice: on which she immediately knew him, and falling down before him, would have embraced his knees, according to that modesty and reverence with which the women of the East saluted the men, especially those who were their superiors in station.

But Jesus refused this compliment, telling her, that he was not going immediately into heaven. He was often to show himself to the disciples before he ascended; so that she would have frequent opportunities of testifying her regard to him. And at the same time said to her, "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God."

Thus did the blessed Jesus contemplate, with a singular pleasure, the work of redemption he had just

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

finished The happy relation between God and man, which had been long cancelled by sin, was now renewed. The Almighty, who had disowned them on account of their disobedience, was again reconciled to them; he was become their God and Father; they were exalted to the honourable relation of Christ's brethren, and the sons of God; and their Father loved them with an affection far exceeding that of the most tender-hearted parent upon earth. The kindness of this message, sent by our dear Redeemer to his disciples, will appear above all praise, if we remember their late behaviour. They had every one of them forsaken him in the greatest extremity: when he was scourged and mocked by the Roman soldiers, derided by his countrymen, and spitefully entreated by all, they hid themselves in some place of safety, and preferred their own security to the deliverance of their Master. When he fainted under the burden of his cross, none of them were there to assist him.

Simon, a Cyrenian, was compelled by the Roman soldiers to ease him of his ponderous burden. But notwithstanding they had refused to assist their Master during his sufferings for the sins of the world, he graciously, he freely, forgave them; he assured them of their pardon, and

called them even by the endearing name of brethren.

There is something very remarkable in this part of the history. None of the apostles or male disciples were honoured with the first appearance of the angels, or with the immediate news of the resurrection of the Son of God, much less with the appearance of Jesus himself.

The angels in the sepulchre kept themselves invisible all the time that Peter and John were observing the linen clothes, and satisfying themselves that the body of their Master was not there. Perhaps the male disciples in general were treated with this mark of disrespect, both because they had, with shameful cowardice, forsaken their Master when he was betrayed into the hands of his enemies, and because their faith was so weak that they had absolutely despaired of his being the Messiah, when they saw him expire on the cross. But how different was the conduct of the women! Laying aside the weakness and timidity natural to their sex, they showed an uncommon magnanimity on this melancholy occasion. For, in contradiction to those of the Jews, who so vehemently required Jesus to be crucified as a deceiver, they proclaimed his innocence by tears, cries, and

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

lamentations, when they saw him led forth to suffer on mount Calvary ; accompanied him to the cross, the most infamous of all punishments ; kindly waited on him in his expiring moments, giving him all the consolation in their power, though at the same time the sight of his sufferings pierced them to the heart ; and when he expired, and his body was carried off, they accompanied him to his grave, not despairing, though they found he had not delivered himself, but to appearance was conquered by death, the universal enemy of mankind. Perhaps these pious women entertained some faint hopes that he would still revive. Or, if they did not entertain expectations of that kind, they at least cherished a strong degree of love for their Lord, and determined to do him all the honour in their power.

A faith so remarkably strong, a love so ardent, and a fortitude so unshaken, could not fail of receiving distinguished marks of the divine approbation : and they were accordingly honoured with the news of Christ's resurrection, before the male disciples had their eyes cheered with the first sight of their beloved Lord, after he arose from the chambers of the grave ; so that they preached the joyful tidings of his resurrection to the apostles themselves.

But there seems to have been

other reasons why our great Redeemer showed himself first to the women. The thoughts of the apostles were constantly fixed on a temporal kingdom, and they had wrested all his words into an agreement with that favourite notion. And whatever they could not construe as consonant to that opinion, they seemed either to have disbelieved or disregarded.

Hence, notwithstanding Jesus had repeatedly foretold his own sufferings, they were astonished above measure when they found he had expired on the cross. Immortality and terrestrial dominion were, according to their notion, the characteristics of the Messiah ; for which reason, when they found that, instead of establishing himself in the possession of universal empire, he had neither delivered himself from a handful of enemies, nor even from death, they gave over the hopes of his being the Messiah. And as for the resurrection, they seem not to have entertained the least notion of it ; so that when the news of this great event was brought to them, they doubted the truth of the information.

Not so the women ; they were more submissive to their Master's instructions, and consequently were much better prepared for seeing him after his resurrection than the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

apostles: for though they did not expect that he would rise from the dead, yet they were not prejudiced against it. This cannot be said of the apostles: they not only absolutely rejected the matter at first as a thing incredible, but even after they were acquainted with the accounts the soldiers had given of this great transaction; nay, after they had seen the blessed Jesus himself, some of them were so unreasonable as still to doubt. How much rather then would their incredulity have led them to suspect his appearing as an illusion, had he showed himself to them? These reports led him to point out the arguments proper for disposing them to believe; particularly the prophecies that had been so often delivered in their own hearing, concerning his resurrection. Hence the angels, when they told this event to the women, and desired them to carry the news of it to his disciples, put them in mind of the predictions Jesus himself had made. as a confirmation of it. Hence we also see the reason why Jesus, before he had made himself known to the disciples at Emmaus, had prepared them for a discovery, by expounding to them on the road the several prophecies concerning the Messiah contained in the Old Testament.

The women on their arrival told

as many of the disciples as they could find, that they had seen at the sepulchre the appearance of angels, who assured them that Jesus was risen from the dead. This new information astonished the disciples exceedingly; and as they had before sent Peter and John to examine into the truth of what Mary Magdalene had told them, concerning the body being removed out of the sepulchre, so they now judged it highly proper to send some of their number to see the angels, and learn from them the joyful tidings of that great transaction, of which the women had given them an account.

That it was really the case, appears from what the disciples in their journey to Emmaus, told their great Lord and Master; namely, that when the women came and told them that they had seen the angels, certain of their number went to the sepulchre, and found it even as the women had said, but him they saw not.

The second deputation from the apostles did not go alone: for as Mary Magdalene returned with Peter and John, who were sent to examine the truth of her information so the women who brought an account of the appearance of angels, in all probability returned with those who were sent to be witnesses of the truth of their report. Besides

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

curiosity, they had an errand thither. The angels had expressly ordered them to tell the news to Peter in particular; for which reason, when they understood that he was gone to the sepulchre, it is natural to think they would return with the disciples to seek him. About the time that the disciples and women set out from the sepulchre, Peter and John reached the city; but passing through a different street, did not meet their brethren.

The disciples having a great desire to reach the place, soon left the women behind; and just as they arrived, Mary Magdalene, having seen the Lord, was coming away. But they did not meet her, because they entered the garden at one door, while she was coming out at another. When they came to the sepulchre, they saw the angels, and received from them the news of their blessed Master's resurrection; for St. Luke tells us, "They found it even as the women had said." Highly elated with what they saw, they departed, and ran back to the city, with such expedition that they gave an account of what they had seen in the hearing of two disciples, before Mary Magdalene arrived.

Nor will their speed appear at all incredible, if we consider that the nature of the tidings the apostles had to carry gave them wings, as it

were, to make their brethren partakers of their joy at this surprising transaction.

In the meantime, the company of women, who followed the disciples, happened to meet Peter and John. But they had not gone far from the sepulchre before Jesus himself met them, and said, "All hail!" On which they approached their great Lord and Master, "held him by the feet, and worshipped him." This favour of embracing his knees Jesus had previously refused to Mary Magdalene, because it was not then necessary; but he granted it to the women, because the angel's words having strongly impressed their minds with the notion of his resurrection, they might have taken his appearance for an illusion of their own imagination, had he not permitted them to touch him, and convince themselves, by the united reports of their senses, that he was their great Lord and Master, who was then risen from the dead, after having suffered on the cross for the sins of mankind.

This company of pious women having tarried some time with Jesus on the road, did not arrive with the joyful tidings of their great Master's resurrection till some time after Peter and John; and perhaps were overtaken by Mary Magdalene on the road, unless we suppose that she

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

arrived a few minutes before them. But be that as it may, this is certain, that they arrived either at or near the same time; so that their accounts of this most miraculous event tended to confirm each other.

The disciples were now lost in astonishment at what the women had related: they considered the account they had before given them, of their having seen the angels, as an improbability; and now they seem to have considered this as something worse, for the evangelist tells us that they “believed not.”

Peter, indeed, to whom the angel sent the message, was disposed, by his sanguine temper, to give a little more credit to their words than the rest; possibly because the messengers from the heavenly Canaan had done him the honour of naming him in particular.

Elated with the respect thus paid him, he immediately repaired again to the sepulchre; hoping, in all probability, that his Master would appear to him, or at least the angel who had so particularly distinguished him from the rest of the disciples.

As soon as Peter arrived at the sepulchre, he stooped down, and seeing the linen clothes lying in the same manner as before, he viewed their position, the form in which they were laid, and returned, won-

dering greatly in himself at what had happened.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Jesus appears, on divers occasions, to different Disciples—Reproves and convinces Thomas of his unbelief—Shows himself to a great number of his Followers in Galilee.

SOON after the women's first return to the disciples with the news that they had seen the appearance of angels, who told them that Jesus was risen from the dead, two of the brethren departed on their journey to a village called Emmaus, about two miles distant from Jerusalem. The concern they were in on account of the death of their great and beloved Master, was sufficiently visible in their countenances. And as they pursued their journey, talking with one another, and debating about the things that had lately happened among them, concerning the life and doctrine, the sufferings and death, of the holy Jesus, and of the report that was just spread among his disciples, of his being that very morning risen from the dead, Jesus himself overtook them, and joined company with them.

As he appeared like a stranger, they did not in the least suspect that their fellow-traveller was no other than the great Redeemer of the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

sons of men. He soon entered into discourse with them, by inquiring what event had so closely engaged them in conversation, and why they appeared so sorrowful and dejected, as if they had met with some heavy disappointment?

One of them, whose name was Cleopas, being surprised at the question, replied, Is it possible that you can be so great a stranger to the affairs of the world, as to have been at Jerusalem and not to have heard the surprising events that have happened there? events that have astonished the whole city, and are now the constant topic of conversation among all the inhabitants? Jesus asked, what surprising events he meant? To which Cleopas replied, The transactions which have happened concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who appeared as a great prophet and teacher sent from God; and accordingly was highly venerated among the people, for the excellency of his doctrine, his humility of life, and the number, benefit, and greatness of his miracles.

Our chief priests and elders, therefore, envying him as one who lessened their authority over the people, apprehended him, and found means to put him to death.

But we firmly believed he would have proved himself the Messiah, or great deliverer: and this persuasion

we a long time supported; nor were we willing to abandon it, even when we saw him put to death. But it is now three days since these things were done; and therefore begin to fear we were mistaken.

This very morning, indeed, a thing happened, which extremely surprises us, and we were very solicitous with regard to the event. Some women, who had entertained the same hopes and expectations as we, going early in the morning to pay the last duties to their Master, by embalming his body, returned with great haste to the city, and informed us that they had been at the sepulchre, but were disappointed in not finding the body; and, to increase our surprise, they added, that they had seen the appearance of angels, who told them that Jesus was risen from the dead.

This relation seemed at first to us not probable, nay, altogether incredible; but two of the company going immediately after to the sepulchre, found everything exactly as the women had reported; they saw the angels, but heard not any thing of the body; so that we are still in doubt and perplexity with regard to this wonderful event.

In reply, Jesus said, Why are ye so very averse to believe all that the prophets have with one voice predicted concerning the Messiah? Is

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

it not clearly and very expressly foretold in all the prophetic writings, that it was appointed by the counsel of Omnipotence for the Messiah to suffer in this manner ; and that after sustaining the greatest indignities, reproach, and contempt, from the malice and perverseness of mankind, and even undergoing an ignominious and cruel death, he should be exalted to a glorious and eternal kingdom ! Having said this, he began at the writings of Moses, and explained to them in order all the principal passages, both in the books of that great legislator, and the writings of the other prophets, relating to his own sufferings, death, and glorious resurrection.

And this he did with such surprising plainness, clearness, and strength, that the two disciples, not yet suspecting who he was, were as much amazed to find a stranger so well acquainted with all that Jesus did and suffered, as they at first wondered at his appearing to be totally ignorant of these transactions. They were also astonished to hear him interpret and apply the Scriptures to their present purpose, with such readiness and convincing clearness of argument as carried with it a strange and unusual authority and efficacy. When, therefore, they came to the village whither they were going, and Jesus seemed

as if he would have passed on, and travelled farther, they, desirous of his company, pressed him in the strongest manner to tarry with them that night, as it was then late.

To this request the Redeemer of mankind consented ; and when they were sat down to supper he took bread, and gave thanks to God, and brake it and gave it to them, in the same manner he used to do while he conversed with them upon earth, before his death. This engaged their attention, and, looking steadfastly on him, they perceived it was their great and beloved Master.

But they had no time then to express their joy and astonishment to their benevolent Redeemer ; for he instantly vanished out of their sight.

As soon as they found their Master was departed, they said one to another, How slow and stupid were we before, not to know him upon the road, while he explained to us the Scriptures ; when, besides the affability of his discourse, and the strength and clearness of his arguments, we perceived such an authority in what he said, and such a powerful efficacy attending his words, even striking our hearts with affection, that we could not but have known it (if we had not been remarkably stupid) to have been the very same that used to accompany his teaching, and was peculiar to it.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

This surprising event would not permit them to stay any longer in Emmaus. They returned that very night to Jerusalem, and found the apostles, with several other disciples, discoursing about the resurrection of their Master; and, on their entering the room, the disciples accosted them, saying, "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared unto Simon."

They had given little credit to the reports of the women, supposing they were occasioned more by imagination than reality. But when a person of Peter's capacity and gravity declared he had seen the Lord, they began to think that he was really risen from the dead. And their belief was greatly confirmed by the arrival of the two disciples from Emmaus, who declared to their brethren how Jesus appeared to them on the road, and how they discovered him to be their Master by the circumstances before related.

While the disciples from Emmaus were thus describing the manner of the appearance of Jesus to them, and offering arguments to convince those who doubted the truth of it, their great Master himself put an end to the debate, by standing in the midst of them, and saying, "Peace be unto you."

This appearance of our blessed Saviour greatly terrified the disciples,

who supposed they had seen a spirit; for having secured the door of the house where they were assembled, for fear of the Jews, and Jesus having opened the locks by his miraculous power, without the knowledge of any in the house, it was natural for them to think that a spirit only could enter. The circumstance, therefore, of the doors being shut, is very happily mentioned by St. John; because it suggests a reason why the disciples took their Master for a spirit, notwithstanding many of them were convinced that he was really risen from the dead, and were at that moment conversing about his resurrection.

But to dispel their fears and doubts, Jesus came forward, and spoke to them in the most endearing manner, showed them his hands and his feet, and desired them to handle him, in order to convince themselves, by the united powers of their different senses, that it was he himself, and no spectre or apparition. "Why are ye troubled," said the benevolent Redeemer of mankind, "and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have."

These infallible proofs sufficiently convinced the disciples of the truth

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

of their Lord's resurrection, and they received him with rapture and exultation. But their joy and wonder had so great an effect upon their minds, that some of them, sensible of the great commotion they were in, suspended their belief till they had considered the matter more calmly. Jesus, therefore, knowing their thoughts, called for meat, and ate with them, in order to prove more fully the truth of his resurrection from the dead, and the reality of his presence with them on this occasion.

After giving this farther ocular demonstration of his having vanquished the power of death, and opened the tremendous portals of the grave, he again repeated his salutation, "Peace be unto you." Adding, "The same commission that my Father hath given unto me, I give unto you; go ye, therefore, into every part of the world, and preach the gospel to all the children of men." Then breathing on them, he said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost, to direct and assist you in the execution of your commission. Whosoever embraces your doctrine, sincerely repents, and believes on me, ye shall declare unto him the free forgiveness of his sins, and your declaration shall be ratified and confirmed in the courts of heaven. And whosoever either obstinately

rejects your doctrine, disobeys it, or behaves himself unworthily after he has embraced it, his sins shall not be forgiven him; but the censure ye shall pass upon him on earth shall be confirmed in heaven.

Thomas, otherwise called Didymus, was absent at the meeting of the apostles; nor did this happen without the special direction of Providence, that the particular and extraordinary satisfaction which was afterwards granted him, might be an abundant and undeniable testimony of the truth of our blessed Saviour's resurrection, to all succeeding generations. The rest of the apostles, therefore, told him that they had seen the Lord, and repeated to him the words he had delivered in their hearing. But Thomas replied, "This event is of such great importance, that unless, to prevent all possibility of deception, I see him with mine own eyes, and feel him with mine own hands, putting my fingers into the print of the nails whereby he was fastened to the cross, and thrust my hand into his side which the soldier pierced with the spear, I will not believe that he is really and truly risen from the dead."

Thus have we enumerated, in the most explicit manner, the transactions of that day on which the great Redeemer of mankind arose

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

from the dead; a day highly to be remembered by the children of men, throughout all generations. A day in which was fully completed and displayed the conceptions lodged in the breast of infinite wisdom! even those thoughts of love and mercy on which the salvation of the world depended. Christians have, therefore, the highest reason to solemnise this day with gladness, each returning week, by ceasing from their labour, and giving up themselves to prayer, hearing and reading the word of God, pious meditation, and other exercises of religion. The redemption of mankind, which they weekly commemorate, affords matter for eternal praise; it is a subject impossible to be equalled, and whose lustre neither length of time nor frequent reviewing can either tarnish or diminish. It resembles the sun, which we behold always the same glorious and luminous object; for the benefit we celebrate is, after so many ages, as fresh and beautiful as ever, and will always continue the same, flourishing in the memories of pious people, through the endless revolutions of eternity. Redemption is the brightest mirror by which we contemplate the goodness of the Almighty. Other gifts are only mites from the divine treasury; but redemption opens, I had almost said

exhausts, all the stores of his grace. May it be constantly the favourite subject of our meditations, more delightful to our musing minds than applause to the ambitious ear! May it be the darling theme of our discourse; sweeter to our tongues than the dropping of the honeycomb to the taste! May it be our choicest comfort through all the changes of this mortal life; and the reviving cordial, even in the last extremities of dissolution itself!

Eight days after the resurrection of our great Redeemer, the blessed Jesus showed himself again to his disciples while Thomas was with them, and upbraided that disciple for his unbelief; but knowing that it did not, like that of the Pharisees', proceed from a wicked mind, but from an honest heart, and a sincere desire of being satisfied of the truth, he thus addressed himself to his doubting disciple: "Thomas," said he, "since thou wilt not be contented to rely on the testimony of others, but must be convinced by the experience of thy own senses, behold the wounds in my hands, and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side, and doubt no longer of the reality of my resurrection."

Thomas was immediately induced to believe by the invitation of his dear Master, and being fully satis-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

fied, he cried out, "I am abundantly convinced; thou art, indeed, my Lord, the very same that was crucified; and I acknowledge thine almighty power in having triumphed over death, and worship thee as my God."

To which the blessed Jesus replied: "Because thou hast seen me, Thomas, thou hast believed that I am really risen from the dead. But blessed are they who, without such evidence of the senses, shall, upon credible testimony, be willing to believe and embrace a doctrine which tends so greatly to the glory of God, and the salvation of the sons of men."

St. John adds, that the blessed Jesus appeared on several other occasions to his disciples, after his resurrection; and by many clear and infallible proofs (not mentioned by the evangelist) fully convinced them that he was alive after his passion. But those which are mentioned are abundantly sufficient to excite men to believe that Jesus was the son of God, the great Messiah so often foretold by the ancient prophets; and by means of that belief they may attain everlasting life in the happy regions of the heavenly Canaan.

Our blessed Saviour having, first by the angels, and afterwards in person, ordered his disciples to repair to their respective habitations

in Galilee, it is reasonable to think they would leave Jerusalem as soon as possible. This they accordingly did, and, on their arrival at their respective places of abode, applied themselves to their usual occupations; and the apostles returned to their old trade of fishing on the lake of Tiberias. Here they were toiling with their nets very early in the morning, and saw Jesus standing on the shore, but did not then know him to be their Master, as it was somewhat dark, and they were at a considerable distance from him. He, however, called to them, and asked if they had taken any fish? To which they answered, they had caught nothing. He then desired them to let down their net on the right side of the boat, and they should not be disappointed.

The disciples, imagining that he might be acquainted with the places proper for fishing, did as he directed them, and enclosed in their net such a prodigious multitude of fishes, that they were not able to draw it into the boat, but were forced to drag it after them in the water towards the shore.

It seems they had toiled all the preceding night to no purpose; and therefore such remarkable success could not fail of causing various conjectures among them, with regard to the stranger on the shore

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

who had given them such happy advice. Some of the apostles declared they could not imagine who he was; but others were persuaded that this person was no other than their great and beloved Master. John was fully convinced of his being the Lord, and accordingly told his thoughts to Simon Peter, who, making no doubt of it, girded on his fisher's coat, and leaped into the sea, in order to get ashore sooner than the boat could be brought to land, dragging after it a net full of large fishes.

When the disciples came ashore, they found a fire kindled, and on it a fish broiling, and near it some bread. But neither being sufficient for the company, Jesus bade them bring some of the fish they had now caught, and invited them to eat with him. Thus did the blessed Jesus prove again to his disciples the reality of his resurrection, not only by eating with them, but by working a miracle like that which, at the beginning of his ministry, had made such an impression upon them, as disposed them to be his constant followers.

This was the third time that Jesus appeared publicly to a great number of his disciples in a body, besides showing himself at several times to particular persons, upon several occasions.

When they had eaten, Jesus reminded Peter how diligent and zealous he ought to be, in order to wipe off the stain of his denying him when he was carried before the high-priest: "Simon, son of Jonas," said our blessed Saviour to him, "art thou more zealous and affectionate in thy love towards me than the rest of my disciples?" To which Peter answered, "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." He was taught modesty and diffidence by his late fall; and therefore would not compare himself with others, but humbly appealed to his Master's omniscience, for the sincerity of his regard to him. Jesus answered, Express then thy love towards me, by the care of my flock committed to thy charge. "Feed my lambs; feed my sheep." Show thy love to me, by publishing the great salvation I have accomplished; and feeding the souls of faithful believers with that food which never perishes, but endures for ever and ever.

"I well know indeed," continued the blessed Jesus, "that thou wilt continue my faithful shepherd even until death. For the time will come when thou who now girdest on thy fisher's coat voluntarily, and stretchest out thy hands to come to me, shalt in thy old age be girt by others, and forced to stretch out thy hands

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

against thy will, in a very different manner, for the sake of thy constant profession of my religion."

By these last words, Jesus signified the manner of Peter's death, and that he should finally suffer martyrdom, for the glory of God and the testimony of the truth of the Christian religion.

The time being now come when the disciples were to meet their great Lord and Master, according to the messages he had sent them by the women, and in all probability appointed at some former appearance not mentioned by the Evangelists, the brethren set out for the mountain in Galilee, perhaps that on which he was transfigured. Here five hundred of them were gathered together, expecting the joyful sight of their great Master, after he had triumphed over death and the grave; some of them not having yet seen him after his resurrection.

They did not wait long before Jesus appeared, on which they were seized with rapture, their hearts overflowed with gladness, they approached their kind, their benevolent Master, and worshipped him. Some few indeed doubted; it being natural for men to be afraid to believe what they vehemently wished, lest they should indulge themselves in false joys, which vanish like a morning cloud. But Jesus afterwards

appeared frequently to them, and gave them full satisfaction, and instructed them in many things relating to their preaching the gospel, establishing the church, and spreading it through the whole earth.

CHAPTER XLIV.

Our blessed Lord instructs his Disciples in what manner they should conduct themselves in order to propagate the Doctrine of the Gospel—Promises to assist them in this important business—Gives them his final blessing, and ascends into Heaven—Comparison between Moses, the great Lawgiver, and our blessed Saviour—General Review of the Life and Doctrines of the great Redeemer of Mankind.

A FEW days before the feast of Pentecost, or "feast of weeks," the disciples went up to Jerusalem, where the blessed Jesus made his last appearance to them; and, after instructing them in many particulars concerning the kingdom of God, and the manner they were to behave themselves in propagating the doctrine of the gospel, he put them in mind, that, during his abode with them in Galilee, he had often told them that all things written in the law, the prophets, and the psalms, concerning him, were to be exactly accomplished. At the same time, "he opened their understandings" by divine illumination, he removed their prejudices by the operation of his Spirit, cleared their doubts im-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

proved their memories, strengthened their judgments and enabled them to discern the true meaning of the Scriptures.

Having thus qualified them for receiving the truth, he again assured them, that both Moses and the prophets had foretold that the Messiah was to suffer in the very manner he had suffered; that he was to rise from the dead on the third day, as he had done; and that repentance and remission of sins were to be preached in the Messiah's name among all nations, beginning with the Jews in Jerusalem.

He next delivered unto them their commission to preach the doctrine of repentance and remission of sins, in his name among all nations, and to testify unto the world the exact accomplishment in him of all things foretold concerning the Messiah; and, to enable them to perform this important work, promised to bestow on them the gift of the Holy Spirit, which he called the promise of his Father, because the Almighty had promised him by his prophets.

Having thus strengthened them for the important work they were going to undertake, he led them on to the mount of Olives, as far as Bethany: where, standing on a hill above the town, he told them that he was going to ascend to his Fa-

ther; for which reason they might go courageously through all the world, and preach the gospel to every rational creature: that they who believed should be admitted into his church by rite of baptism, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and be taught, in consequence of their baptism, to obey all the precepts he had enjoined them; that such baptized believers should receive the pardon of their sins, together with eternal life in the happy mansions of his Father's kingdom; but such as refused to embrace the doctrines of the gospel, should be for ever excluded those happy regions, and have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone: that while they were employed in this work, he would be constantly with them, to assist them by his Spirit, and protect them by his providence. Finally, that those who should, through their preaching, be induced to believe, should themselves work most astonishing miracles, by which the gospel should be propagated with the greatest rapidity.

When the blessed Jesus had spoken these things, he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And, in the action of blessing them, he was parted from them in the midst of the day, a shining cloud receiving him out their sight: that is, this

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

brilliant cloud encompassed him about, and carried him up to heaven; not suddenly, but at leisure, that they might behold him departing, and see the proof of his ascending into heaven, as he had promised them.

The cloud in which the blessed Jesus ascended was more bright and pure than the clearest lambent flame, being, as is supposed, no other than the Shechinah, or glory of the Lord; the visible symbol of the divine presence, which had so often appeared to the patriarchs of old; which filled the temple at its dedication, and which, in its greatest splendour, could not be beheld with mortal eyes; for which reason it is called the light inaccessible.

As he ascended, the flaming cloud that surrounded him marked his passage through the air, but gradually lost its magnitude in the eyes of those who stood below, till it at last vanished together with their beloved Master out of their sight.

Thus was the great Redeemer of mankind triumphantly carried into heaven, where he now sitteth at the right hand of God his Father; to whom be honour, glory, and power, for ever and ever. Amen.

Hossanna to the Prince of light,
That cloth'd himself in clay;
Enter'd the iron gates of death,
And tore the bars away.

Death is no more the king of dread,
Since Christ our Lord arose;
He took the tyrant's sting away,
And spoil'd our hellish foes.

See how the Conq'ror mounts aloft,
And to his Father flies,
With scars of honour in his flesh,
And triumph in his eyes!

There our exalted Saviour reigns,
And scatters blessings down;
Our Jesus fills the right-hand seat
Of the celestial throne.

In this illustrious manner did the great Redeemer of mankind depart, after having finished the grand work which he left the bosom of his Father to execute; which angels with joy described was to happen, and which, through eternity to come, shall, at periods the most immensely distant from the time of its execution, be looked back upon with inexpressible delight, by every inhabitant of heaven; for though the minute affairs of time may vanish altogether and be lost, when they are removed far back by the endless progression of duration, this object is such, that no distance, however great, can lessen. The kingdom of heaven is erected on the incarnation and sufferings of the Son of God, the kingdom and city of the Almighty, comprehending all the people of God in the universe, made happy by goodness and love,



The Ascension

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

and therefore none of them can ever forget the foundation on which their happiness stands established. The human beings in particular, recovered by the labour of the Son of God, will view their deliverer, and look back on his stupendous undertaking, with the highest rapture, while they are feasting without interruption on its delicious fruits. The angels, likewise, the celestial inhabitants of the city of God, will contemplate it with perpetual pleasure, as the happy means of recovering their kindred that were lost, and bringing them to a joint and proper subjection to Him who reigneth for ever, and whose favour is better than life itself.

Thus have we followed our dear Redeemer through all the transactions of his life, and enlarged on the stupendous miracle of his resurrection, on which glorious event the whole Christian doctrine is founded.

As the similarity between Christ and the lawgiver Moses (whom the divine Redeemer mentioned to his disciples but a short time before his ascension into heaven) is so very remarkable, we shall, as an illustration of the glorious subject, point out a few instances, which will evince that the prophecies of old were only to be completed in the sufferings and death of Christ.

Moses was the most distinguished

of all the prophets, and his greatest prophecy was that of another prophet to be raised up like unto himself. He was, at the time of this prediction, about to leave his people; and therefore, to give them some comfort, he promised them another prophet. "The Lord thy God," said he, "will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken."—*Deut.* xviii. 15.

That this person, of whom Moses prophesied, was the great Redeemer of Mankind, is amply evident; and that Moses resembled Christ in a much greater degree than any other person ever did, will appear from the following circumstances.

Both Moses and Christ showed signs and wonders; and in these respects none of the ancient prophets were like unto Moses. None of them were lawgivers; they only interpreted and enforced the laws of Moses. None of them had such clear communication with God: they all "saw visions, and dreamed dreams." Moses and Christ are the only two who so perfectly resembled each other in these respects.

Moses fled from his country to escape the hands of the king of Egypt: so did Christ, when his parents went into Egypt. Afterwards "the Lord said unto Moses,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

in Midian, Go, return into Egypt; for all the men are dead which sought thy life.”—*Exod.* iv. 19. So the angel of the Lord said to Joseph, in nearly the same words, “Arise, and take the young child, and go into the land of Israel; for they are dead which sought the young child’s life.”—*Matt.* ii. 20. Pointing him out, as it were, for that Prophet who should arise like unto Moses.

Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction; Christ refused to be made king, choosing rather to suffer the like.

Moses (says St. Stephen) “was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians;” and Josephus says, that he was a very forward and accomplished youth, and had wisdom and knowledge above his years. St. Luke observes of Christ, that “he increased” (betimes) “in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man;” and his discourses in the temple with the doctors, when he was but twelve years old, were a proof of it.

Moses was not only a lawgiver, a prophet, and a worker of miracles, but a king and a priest: in all these offices the likeness between Moses and Christ was singular.

Moses brought darkness over the land; the sun withdrew his light at

Christ’s crucifixion: and as the darkness which spread over Egypt was followed by the destruction of their first-born, and of Pharaoh and his host; so the darkness at Christ’s death was the forerunner of the destruction of the Jews.

Moses foretold the calamities which would befall the nation for their disobedience: so did Christ

The spirit which was in Moses was conferred in some degree upon the seventy elders, and they prophesied: Christ conferred miraculous powers on his seventy disciples.

Moses was victorious over powerful kings and great nations: so was Christ, by the effects of his religion, and by the fall of those who persecuted his church.

Moses conquered Amalek by holding up both his hands: Christ overcame his and our enemies when his hands were fastened to the cross. Moses interceded for transgressors, and caused an atonement to be made for them, and stopped the wrath of God: so did Christ.

Moses ratified a covenant between God and the people, by sprinkling them with blood: Christ with his own blood.

Moses desired to die for the people, and prayed that God would forgive them, or blot him out of his book: Christ did more; he died for sinners.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Moses instituted the passover, when a lamb was sacrificed, none of whose bones were to be broken, and whose blood protected the people from destruction: Christ was the paschal Lamb.

Moses lifted up the serpent, that they who looked upon it might be healed of their mortal wounds: by proper looking up to Christ, all such will be healed.

All the affection of Moses towards the people, all his cares and toils on their account, were repaid by them with ingratitude, murmuring, and rebellion: the same returns the Jews made to Christ for all his benefits.

Moses was ill used by his own family; his brother and sister rebelled against him: there was a time when Christ's own brethren believed not on him, and his disciples forsook him.

Moses had a very wicked and perverse generation committed to his care and conduct; and, to enable him to rule them, miraculous powers were given to him, and he used his utmost endeavours to make the people obedient to God, and to save them from ruin, but in vain; in the space of forty-two years they all fell in the wilderness, except two: Christ also was given to a generation not less wicked and perverse, his instructions and his miracles were lost upon most of them, and in

about the same space of time after they had rejected him, they were destroyed.

Moses was very meek above all the men that were on the earth: so was Christ.

The people could not enter into the land of promise until Moses was dead: by the death of Christ the kingdom of heaven was opened to believers.

Moses enlightened the Jews under the dispensation of the old law: Christ enlightened the Christians under the gospel.

Moses did great wonders in the land of Egypt: Christ did great miracles in Judea.

In the deaths of Moses and Christ there is also a resemblance in some circumstances: Moses died, in some sense, for the iniquities of the people; it was their rebellion which was the occasion of it, which drew down the displeasure of God upon them and upon him. Moses went up in the sight of the people to the top of mount Nebo, and there he died, when he was in perfect vigour, when "his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated:" Christ suffered for the sins of men, and was led up, in the presence of the people, to mount Calvary, where he died in the flower of his age, and when he was in his full natural strength.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Neither Moses nor Christ, as far as we can collect from sacred history, were ever sick, or felt any bodily decay or infirmity which would have rendered them unfit for the toils they underwent; their sufferings were of another kind.

Lastly, as Moses, a little before his death, promised another prophet; so Christ, before his death, promised another Comforter.

Moses, says St. Ambrose, was the figure of that Preceptor that was to come; who should preach the gospel, fulfil the Old Testament, build the New, and feed the people with celestial aliment.

Such are the comparisons relative to the great resemblance between Moses and Christ; but the greatest similitude consists in their both being lawgivers, which no other prophet ever was. They may resemble each other in many other circumstances, and a fruitful imagination may strike upon farther resemblances; but what we have been mentioning may suffice. And we may ask, Is this similitude between Moses and Christ the effect of mere chance? Let us search all the records of universal history, and see if we can find a man who was so like to Christ as Moses was. If we cannot find such an one, then have we "found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did

write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of God."

We shall conclude this chapter with a few observations on the general conduct of our blessed Redeemer during his abode with men on earth.

The human character of the blessed Jesus, as it results from the account given of him by the evangelists (for they have not formally drawn it up), is entirely different from that of all other men whatsoever; for whereas they have selfish passions deeply rooted in their breasts, and are influenced by them in almost everything they do, Jesus was so entirely free from them, that the most severe scrutiny cannot furnish one single action in the whole course of his life wherein he consulted his own interest only. No; he was influenced by very different motives: the present happiness and eternal welfare of sinners, regulated his conduct; and while others followed their respective occupations, Jesus had no other business than that of doing the will of his Father, and promoting the happiness of the sons of men. Nor did he wait till he was solicited to extend his benevolent hand to the distressed: "he went about doing good," and always accounted it "more blessed to give than to receive;" resembling God rather than man. Benevolence was

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

the very life of his soul: he not only did good to objects presented to him for relief, but industriously sought them out, in order to extend his compassionate assistance.

It is common for persons of the most exalted faculties to be elated with success and applause, or dejected by censure and disappointments; but the blessed Jesus was never elated by the one, nor depressed by the other. He was never more courageous than when he met with the greatest opposition and cruel treatment; nor more humble than when the sons of men worshipped at his feet.

He came into the world inspired with the grandest purpose that ever was formed, that of saving from eternal perdition, not a single nation, but the whole world; and in the execution of it went through the longest and heaviest train of labours that ever was sustained, with a constancy and resolution on which no disadvantageous impression could be made by any accident whatever. Calumny, threatenings, bad success, with many other evils, constantly attending him, served only to quicken his endeavours in this glorious enterprise, which he unceasingly pursued, even till he had finished it by his death.

The generality of mankind are

prone to retaliate injuries received, and all seem to take a satisfaction in complaining of the cruelties of those who oppress them; whereas the whole of Christ's labours breathed nothing but meekness, patience, and forgiveness, even to his bitterest enemies, and in the midst of the most excruciating torments. The words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," uttered by him when his enemies were nailing him to the cross, fitly express the temper which he maintained through the whole course of his life, even when assaulted by the heaviest provocations. He was destined to sufferings here below, in order that he might raise his people to honour, glory, and immortality, in the realms of bliss above; and therefore patiently, yea, joyfully, submitted to all that the malice of earth and hell could inflict. He was vilified, that we might be honoured; he died, that we might live for ever and ever.

To conclude: the greatest and best men have discovered the degeneracy and corruption of human nature, and shown them to have been nothing more than men; but it was otherwise with Jesus. He was superior to all the men that ever lived, both with regard to the purity of his manners and the perfection of his holiness. He was

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.

Whether we consider him as a teacher, or as a man, "he did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." His whole life was perfectly free from spot or weakness; at the same time it was remarkable for the greatest and most extensive exercises of purity and goodness. But never to have committed the least sin, in word or in deed; never to have uttered any sentiment that could be censured, upon the various topics of religion and morality which were the daily subjects of his discourses; and that through the course of a life filled with action, and led under the observation of many enemies, who had always access to converse with him, and who often came to find fault; is a pitch of perfection evidently above the reach of human nature: and consequently he who possessed it must have been divine.

Such was the Person who is the subject of the evangelical history. If the reader, by reviewing his life, doctrine, and miracles, as they are here represented to him, united into one series, has a clearer idea of these things than before, or observes a beauty in his actions thus linked together, which, taken separately, do not appear so fully; if he feels himself touched by the character of

Jesus in general, or with any of his sermons and actions in particular, thus simply delineated in writing, whose principal charms are the beauties of truth; above all, if his dying so generously for men strikes him with admiration, or fills him with hope in the prospect of that pardon which is thereby purchased for the world; let him seriously consider with himself, what improvement he ought to make of the divine goodness.

Jesus, by his death, hath set open the gate of immortality to the sons of men; and by his word, spirit, and example, graciously offers to make them meet for the glorious rewards in the kingdom of the heavenly Canaan, and to conduct them into the inheritance of the saints in light. Let us, therefore, remember that, being born under the dispensation of his gospel, we have from our earliest years enjoyed the best means of securing to ourselves an interest in that favour of God, which is life; and that loving-kindness, which is better than life.

We have been called to aspire after an exaltation to the nature and felicity of the Almighty, exhibited to mortal eyes in the man Christ Jesus, to fire us with the noblest ambition, His gospel teaches us that we are made for eternity; and that our present life is to our future existence

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

as infancy is to manhood. But as in the former many things are to be learned, many hardships to be endured, many habits to be acquired, and that by a course of exercises which, though in themselves painful, and possibly useless to the child, yet are necessary to fit him for the business and enjoyments of manhood; so, while we remain in this infancy of human life, things are to be learned, hardships to be endured, and habits to be acquired, by a laborious discipline, which, however painful, must be undergone, because necessary to fit us for the employments and pleasures of our riper existence in the realms above; always remembering that, whatever our trials may be in this world, if we ask for God's assistance, he has promised to give it. Inflamed, therefore, with love of immortality and its joys, let us submit ourselves to our heavenly Teacher, and learn of him those lessons which alone can render life pleasant, death desirable, and fill eternity with ecstatic joys.

CHAPTER XLV.

Remarks on the peculiar Nature of the Christian Religion, the Principles it inculcates, and its Fitness to render Men holy and humble here, and happily glorified hereafter.

WE cannot close this delightful scene of the life of our dear Lord and Saviour more comfortably than by considering the benefits resulting from a due observance of his doctrines by all who shall by faith receive and embrace the same.

Probably none have been greater enemies to the progress of religion than those who delineate it in a gloomy and terrifying form; nor any guilty of a more injurious calumny against the gospel than those who represent its precepts as rigorous impositions and unnecessary restraints.

True religion is the perfection of human nature, and the foundation of uniform exalted pleasure; of public order, and private happiness. Christianity is the most excellent, and the most useful, institution, having the "promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." It is the voice of reason, it is also the language of Scripture, "The ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace:" and our blessed Saviour himself assures us that his precepts are easy, and the burden of his religion light.

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The Christian religion is a rational service, a worship "in spirit and in truth," a worship worthy of the majesty of the Almighty to receive, and of the nature of man to pay. It comprehends all we ought to believe, and all we ought to practice; its positive rites are but few, of plain and easy significancy, and manifestly adapted to establish a sense of our obligation to God.

The gospel places religion not in abstruse speculation and metaphysical subtleties; not in outward show and tedious ceremony; not in superstitious austerities, and enthusiastic visions; but in purity of heart, and holiness of life. The sum of our duty, according to our great Master himself, consists in the "love of God and of our neighbour;" according to St. Paul, in denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and in living soberly, righteously, and godly, in the present evil world; according to St. James, in visiting the fatherless and widow in affliction, and in keeping ourselves unspotted from the world. This is the constant strain and tenor of the gospel. This it inculcates most earnestly, and on this it lays the greatest stress.

But is the Christian system only a republication of the law of nature, or merely a refined system of morality? No, certainly; it is a great deal more. It is an act of

grace; a stupendous plan of providence, designed for the recovery of mankind from a state of degradation and ruin, to the favour of the Almighty, and to the hopes of a happy immortality, through a Mediator.

Under this dispensation, true religion consists in "repentance towards God," and in "faith in the Lord Jesus Christ," as the person appointed by the supreme authority of heaven and earth to reconcile apostate man to his Creator; as a Sacrifice for sin; our vital Head, and governing Lord. This is religion, as we are Christians. And what hardships, what exaction, is there in all this? Surely none. Nay, the "practice" of religion is much easier than the "servitude" of sin.

Our rational powers, all will readily agree, are dreadfully impaired, and the soul weakened, by sin. The animal passions are strong and corrupt, and oppose the dictates of the Spirit of God: objects of sense make powerful impressions on the mind. We are, in every situation, surrounded with many snares and temptations. In such a disordered state of things, we cannot please God till created anew in Christ Jesus unto new works. We must be born again; born from above.

The God of all grace has planted

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

in the human breast a quick sense of good and evil; a faculty which strongly dictates right and wrong: and though by the strength of appetite and warmth of passion men are often hurried into immoral practices, yet in the beginning, especially when there has been the advantage of a good education, it is usually with reluctance and opposition of mind. What inward struggles precede! what bitter pangs attend their sinful excesses! what guilty blushes and uneasy fears! what frightful prospects and pale reviews! "Terrors are upon them, and a fire not blown consumeth them." To make a mock at sin, and to commit iniquity without remorse, is, in some instances, an attainment that requires length of time, and much painful labour; more labour than is requisite to attain that salvation which is the glory of the man, the ornament of the Christian, and the chief of his happiness.

The soul can no more be reconciled to acts of wickedness and injustice than the body to excess, but by suffering many bitter pains and cruel attacks.

The mouth of conscience may, indeed, be stopped for awhile by false principles; its sacred whispers may be drowned by the noise of company, and stifled by the entertainments of sense; but this prin-

ciple of conscience is so deeply rooted in human nature, and at the same time her voice is so clear and strong, that the sinner's arts will be unable to lull her into a lasting security.

When the hour of calamity arrives, when sickness seizes, and death approaches the sinner, conscience then constrains him to listen to her accusations, and will not suffer the temples of his head to take any rest. "There is no peace to the wicked;" the foundations of peace are subverted: they are at utter enmity with their reason, with their conscience, and with their God.

Not so is the case of true religion. For when religion, pure and genuine, forms the temper and governs the life, conscience applauds, and peace takes her residence in the breast. The soul is in its proper state. There is order and regularity both in the faculties and actions. Conscience of its own integrity, and secure of the Divine approbation, the soul enjoys a calmness not to be described. But why do I call this happy frame calmness only? It is far more than mere calmness. The air may be calm, and the day overcast with thick mists and dark clouds. The pious and virtuous mind resembles a serene day, enlightened and enlivened with the brightest rays of

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

the sun. Though all without may be clouds and darkness, there is light in the heart of a devout man. "He is satisfied with favour, and filled with peace and joy in believing." In the concluding scene, the awful moment of dissolution, all is peaceful and serene. The immortal part quits its tenement of clay, with the well-grounded hope of ascending to happiness and glory.

Nor does the gospel enjoin any duty but what is fit and reasonable. It calls upon all its professors to practice reverence, submission, love, and gratitude, to God; justice, truth, and universal benevolence, to men; and to maintain the government of our minds. And what has any one to object against this? From the least to the greatest commandment of our Redeemer, there is not one which impartial reason can find fault with. "His law is perfect; his precepts are true and righteous altogether." Not even those excepted which require "us to love our enemies, to deny ourselves, and to take up our cross." To forgive an injury is more generous and manly than to revenge it; to control a licentious appetite, than to indulge it; to suffer poverty, reproach, and even death itself, in the sacred cause of truth and integrity, is much wiser and better than by base

compliances to make "shipwreck of faith and a good conscience."

Thus in a storm at sea, or a conflagration on the land, a man with pleasure abandons his lumber to secure his jewels. Piety and virtue are the wisest and most reasonable things in the world; vice and wickedness the most irrational and absurd.

The all-wise Author of our being hath so framed our natures, and placed us in such relations, that there is nothing vicious but what is injurious; nothing virtuous but what is advantageous to our present interest, both with respect to body and mind. Meekness and humility, patience and universal charity, and grace, give a joy "unknown to transgressors."

The divine virtues of truth, equity, and love, are the only bands of friendship, the only supports of society. Temperance and sobriety are the best preservatives of health and strength; but sin and debauchery impair the body, consume the substance, reduce to poverty, and form the direct path to a premature and untimely death. Now this is the chief excellency of all laws, and what will always render their burden pleasant and delightful, that they enjoin nothing unbecoming or injurious.

Besides, to render our duty easy,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

we have the example, as well as the commands of our blessed Jesus. The masters of morality among the heathens gave excellent rules for the regulation of men's manners; but they wanted either the honesty or the courage to try their own arguments upon themselves. It was a strong presumption that the yoke of the Scribes and Pharisees was grievous, when they laid "heavy burdens upon men's shoulders," which they themselves refused to touch with one of their fingers. Not thus our great lawgiver, Jesus Christ the righteous. His behaviour was in all respects, conformable to his doctrine. His devotion, how sublime and ardent! benevolence towards men, how great and diffusive! He was in his life an exact pattern of innocence; for he "did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." In the Son of God incarnate is exhibited the brightest, the fairest resemblance of the Father, that earth or heaven ever beheld; an example peculiarly persuasive, calculated to inspire resolution, and to animate us to use our utmost endeavours to imitate the divine pattern, the example of "the author and finisher of our faith," of him "who loved us, and gave himself for us." Our profession and character as Christians obliges us to make his example the model of our

lives. Every motive of decency, gratitude, and interest, constrain us to tread the paths he trod before us.

We should also remember that our burden is easy: because God, who "knoweth whereof we are made, who considereth that we are but dust," is ever ready to assist us. The heathen sages themselves had some notion of this assistance, though guided only by the glimmering lamp of reason. But what they looked upon as probable, the gospel clearly and strongly asserts. We there hear the apostle exhorting, "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." We there hear the blessed Jesus himself arguing in this convincing manner: "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

I would not here be understood to mean that the agency of the Spirit is irresistible, and lays a necessitating bias on all the faculties and affections of men. Were this the case, precepts and prohibitions, promises and threatenings, would signify nothing; and duty and obligation would be words without a meaning. The Spirit assisteth in a manner agreeably to the frame of human nature; not controlling the

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

free use of reason, but, by assisting the understanding, influencing the will, and renewing the affections. But though we may not be able to explain the mode of his operations, the Scriptures warrant us to assert, that when men are renewed and prepared for heaven, it is "through the sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth." How enlivening the thought! how encouraging the motive! We are not left to struggle alone with the difficulties which attend the practice of religion in the present imperfect state. The merciful Father of our spirits is ever near to help our infirmities, to enlighten the understanding, to strengthen good resolutions, and, in concurrence with our own endeavours, to make us conquerors over all opposition. Faithful is he to his promises, and will not suffer the sincere and faithful to be tempted above what they are able to bear. What can be desired more than this? To promote the happiness of his people, everything is done that is requisite; his grace is all-sufficient, his Spirit is able to conduct us through this vale of tears to never-fading bliss.

We should also remember that the great doctrine of the gospel, concerning the infinite mercy of God to all penitents through Christ Jesus, greatly contributes to the

consolation of Christians. Let it be granted, that the hope of pardon is essential to the religion of fallen creatures, and one of its first principles; yet, considering the doubts and suspicions which are apt to arise in a mind conscious of guilt, it is undoubtedly a great and inestimable favour to be relieved in this respect by a messenger from Omnipotence himself. This is our happiness. We are not left to depend upon consequential reasonings, which the bulk of mankind are little used to; but we are assured that upon our true repentance and believing in Christ we shall, "through his mediation," receive the "full remission of past sins," and be restored to the same state of favour with our Maker, as if we had never transgressed his laws. Here the gospel triumphs. With these assurances it abounds. Upon his head the declarations of our blessed Saviour and his apostles are so express and full, that every one who believes them, and knows himself to be a true penitent, ought to banish every doubt and fear, and rejoice with joy unspeakable. "Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."—*Matt.* xi. 28. "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto man."—*Matt.* xii. 31. Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren,

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses.”—*Acts* xiii. 38, 39. “The blood of Jesus cleanseth from all sin.” What grace and favour is this! Who can dwell upon the transporting theme too long! Now our way is plain before us, and the burden we are to bear is made easy. Our sins are pardonable, if repented of and forsaken.

Consider this, all ye who have never yet regarded religion, but pursued a course of vice and sensuality all your lives long. Though your conduct has been base to the last degree, your case is not desperate. Far from it. The God whom you have so highly offended commiserates your errors, is ever ready to extend his pardoning mercy to his most degenerate creatures, upon their faith and repentance; and “is in Christ Jesus reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing unto” penitent “sinners their trespasses. Let the wicked,” therefore, “forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”—*Isa.* lv. 7.

Another particular which renders

the Christian religion delightful, is its leading us to the perfect, eternal life of heaven. It cannot be denied, but that we may draw from the light of reason strong presumptions of a future state. The present existence does not look like an entire scene, but rather like the infancy of human nature, which is capable of arriving at a much higher degree of maturity: but whatever solid foundation the doctrine of a future state may have in nature and reason, certain it is, through the habitual neglect of reflection, and the force of irregular passions, this doctrine was, before the coming of our blessed Saviour, very much disfigured, and in a great measure lost, amongst the sons of men.

In the heathen world, a future state of rewards and punishments, was a matter of mere speculation and uncertainty; sometimes hoped for, sometimes doubted of, and sometimes absolutely denied. The law of Moses, though of divine original, is chiefly enforced by promises of temporal blessings; and even in the writings of the prophets a future immortality is very sparingly mentioned, and obscurely represented: but the doctrine of our Saviour hath “brought life and immortality to light.” In the gospel we have a distinct account of another world, attended with many engaging cir-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

cumstances ; about which the decisions of reason were dark and confused. We have the testimony of the Author of our religion, who was raised from the dead, and who afterwards, in the presence of his disciples, ascended into heaven. In the New Testament it is expressly declared, that good men, “when absent from the body, are present with the Lord.” Here we are assured of the resurrection of the body in a glorious form, clothed with immortal vigour, suited to the active nature of the animating spirit, and assisting its most enlarged operations and incessant progress towards perfection. Here we are assured, that the “righteous shall go into life everlasting ;” that they shall enter into the kingdom of the heavenly Canaan, where no ignorance shall cloud the understanding, no vice disturb the will. In these regions of perfection, nothing but love shall possess the soul ; nothing but gratitude employ the tongue : there the righteous shall be united to an innumerable company of angels and to the general assembly and church of the first born ; there they shall see their exalted Redeemer at the right hand of Omnipotence, and sit down with him on his throne ; there shall they be admitted into the immediate presence of the supreme Fountain of life and happiness,

and, beholding his face, be farther changed into the same image, from glory to glory. Here language—here imagination fails me ! It requires the genius, the knowledge, and the pen of an angel, to paint the happiness, and blissful scene of the New Jerusalem, which human eyes cannot behold till this mortal body shall be purified from its corruption, and dressed in the robes of immortality : “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart to conceive, the joys which God hath prepared for them that love him.”

What is the heaven of the heathens, compared with the heaven of the Christians ? The hope, the prospect of this, is sufficient to reconcile us to all the difficulties that may attend our progress, sweeten all our labours, alleviate every grief, and silence every murmur.

But why, says the libertine, in the gaiety of his heart, should there be any difficulties or restraint at all ? God hath made nothing in vain. The appetites he hath planted in the human breast are to be gratified. To deny or restrain them, is ignominious bondage ; but to give full scope to every desire and passion of the heart, without check or control, is true manly freedom.

In opposition to this loose and careless way of reasoning, let it be

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

considered, that the liberty of a rational creature doth not consist in an entire exemption from all control, but in following the dictates of reason, as the governing principle, and in keeping the various passions in due subordination. To follow the regular motion of those affections which the wise Creator hath implanted within us, is our duty; but as our natural desires, in this state of trial, are too often irregular, we are bound to restrain their excesses, and not to indulge them but in a strict subserviency to the integrity and peace of our minds, and to the order and happiness of human society established in the world. Those who allow the supreme command to be usurped by sensual and brutal appetites, may “promise themselves liberty,” but are truly and absolutely the “servants of corruption.” To be vicious, is to be enslaved. We behold with pity those miserable objects that are chained in the galleys, or confined in dark prisons and loathsome dungeons: but much more abject and vile is the slavery of the sinner! No slavery of the body is equal to the bondage of the mind; no chains press so closely, or gall so cruelly, as the fetters of sin, which corrode the very substance of the soul, and fetter every faculty.

It must, indeed, be confessed,

that there are some profligates so hardened by custom as to be past all feeling; and because insensible of their bondage, boast of this insensibility as a mark of their native freedom, and of their happiness. Vain men! they might extol, with equal propriety, the peculiar happiness of an apoplexy, or the profound tranquillity of a lethargy.

Thus have we endeavoured to place, in a plain and conspicuous light, some of the peculiar excellencies of the Christian religion: and from hence many useful reflections will naturally arise in the mind of every attentive reader. It is the religion of Jesus that hath removed idolatry and superstition, and brought immortality to light, when concealed under the veil of darkness almost impenetrable. This hath set the great truths of religion in a clear and conspicuous point of view, and proposed new and powerful motives to influence our minds, and to determine our conduct. Nothing is enjoined to be believed but what is worthy of God, nothing to be practised but what is friendly to man. All the doctrines of the gospel are rational and consistent; all its precepts are truly wise, just, and good. The gospel contains nothing grievous to an ingenuous mind; it debars us from nothing, but doing harm to ourselves or to our fellow-

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

creatures ; and permits us to range anywhere, but in the paths of destruction. It only requires us to accept the remedy provided, to act up to its excellent commands, and to prefer to the vanishing pleasures of sin, the smiles of a reconciled God, and “an eternal weight of glory.” And is this a rigorous exaction, a heavy burden not to be endured? How can sinful mortals harbour so unworthy a thought?

Surely, no man who is a real friend to the cause of religion and to the interest of mankind can ever be an enemy to Christianity, if he truly understand it, and seriously reflect on its wise and useful tendency. It conducteth us to our journey's end by the plainest and securest path ; where the “steps are not straitened, and where he that runneth stumbleth not.” Let us who live under this last and most most gracious dispensation of God to mankind, “count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord ;” and not suffer ourselves, by the slight cavils of unbelievers, to be “moved away from the hope of the gospel.” Let us demonstrate that we believe the superior excellency of the Christian dispensation, by depending on Christ, and conforming to his precepts. Let us show that we are Christians in deed and in truth ; not

by endless disputes about trifles, and the transports of a blind zeal, but by abounding in those “fruits of righteousness which are through Christ to the praise and glory of God.”

From what has been said, we may clearly perceive how groundless all those prejudices are, which some conceive against religion, as if it were a peevish, morose scheme, burdensome to human nature, and inconsistent with the true enjoyment of life. Such sentiments are too apt to prevail in the heat of youth, when the spirits are brisk and lively, and the passions warm and impetuous ; but it is wholly a mistake, and a mistake of the most dangerous tendency. The truth is, there is no pleasure like that of a good conscience ; no real peace but what results from the sense of the divine favour. This strengthens the mind, and can alone support it under all the various and unequal scenes of the present state of trial. This lays a sure foundation of an easy, comfortable life, of a serene, peaceful death, and of eternal joy and happiness hereafter : whereas vice is ruinous to all our most valuable interests ; spoils the native beauty and subverts the order of the soul ; renders us the scorn of man, the rejected of God, and, without timely repentance, will rob us of a happy eternity. Religion is

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

the health liberty, and the happiness of the soul; sin is the disease, the servitude, and destruction of it.

If this be not sufficient to convince you, let me lead you into the chamber of an habitual rioter, the lewd debauchee, worn out in the cause of iniquity, "his bones full of the sins of his youth," that from his own mouth, as he lies on his expiring bed, you may learn that "the way of transgressors is hard;" and that however sweet sin may be in the commission, "it strikes like a serpent, and bites like an adder."

I am going, reader, to represent to you the last moments of a person of high birth and spirit; of great parts and strong passions; every way accomplished, but unhappily attached to those paths which lead to vice and destruction.

His unkind treatment was the death of a most amiable wife; and his monstrous extravagance in effect disinherited his only child. And surely the death-bed of a profligate is next in horror to that abyss to which it leads. It has the most of hell that is visible upon earth, and he that hath seen it hath more than faith to confirm him in his creed. I see it now (says the worthy divine from whom I shall borrow this relation), for who can forget it? Are there in it no flames and furies?—You are ignorant then of what a

scared imagination can figure! what a guilty heart can feel! How dismal it is! The two great enemies of soul and body, sickness and sin, sink and confound his friends; silence and darkness are the dismal scene. Sickness excludes the light of heaven, and sin its blessed hope. Oh, double darkness, more than Egyptian! acutely to be felt!

The sad evening before the death of that noble youth, whose last hours suggested these thoughts, I was with him. No one else was there but his physician, and an intimate acquaintance, whom he loved, and whom he had ruined. At my coming, he said,

"You and the physician are come too late—I have neither life nor hope. You both aim at miracles. You would raise the dead."

Heaven, I said, was merciful.

"Or I could not," answered he, "have been thus guilty. What has it not done to bless and to save me? I have been too strong for Omnipotence. I plucked down ruin."

I said, the blessed Redeemer—

"Hold, hold!" said he, "you wound me! This is the rock on which I have split! I denied his name."

Refusing to hear anything from me, or take anything from the physician, he lay silent, as far as sudden darts of pain would permit, till the clock struck. Then he cried out

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

with vehemence, "Oh time, time! it is fit thou shouldst strike thy murderer to the heart. How art thou fled for ever! A month!—Oh, for a single week! I ask not for years, though an age were too little for the much I have to do."

On my saying to him, we could not do too much; that heaven was a blessed place—

"So much the worse," replied he; "'tis lost! 'tis lost! Heaven is to me the severest part of hell!"

Soon after I proposed prayer. To which he answered,

"Pray, you that can: I never prayed, I cannot pray. My conscience is too much wounded. I have deserted my benevolent Maker, and my soul is enveloped in the deepest horrors."

His friend, being much touched, even to tears, at this (for who could forbear?—I could not), he, with a most affectionate look, said,

"Keep these tears for thyself! I have undone thee. Dost thou weep for me? That's cruel. What can pain me more?"

Here his friend, too much affected, would have left him.

"No," said he, "stay. You still may hope;—therefore hear me. How madly have I talked!—how madly hast thou listened and believed! But look upon my present state, as a full answer to thee and

to myself. This body is all weakness and pain; but my soul, as it stung up by torment to greater strength and spirit, is full powerful to reason, full mighty to suffer; and that which thus triumphs within the jaws of mortality, is doubtless immortal. And as for a Deity, nothing less than an Almighty could inflict the pains I feel."

I was about to congratulate this passive, involuntary confession, in his asserting the two prime articles of his creed, extorted by the rack of nature; when he thus very passionately added,

"No, no! let me speak on. I have not long to speak. My much injured friend! my soul, as my body, lies in ruins, in scattered fragments of broken thought. Remorse for the past throws my thoughts on the future. Worse dread of the future strikes it back to the past. I turn, and turn, and find no ray. Didst thou feel half the mountain that is on me, thou wouldst struggle with the martyr for his stake, and bless heaven for the flame; that is not an everlasting flame, that is not an unquenchable fire."

How were we struck! yet soon after, still more. With what an eye of distraction, what a face of despair, he cried out, "My principles have poisoned my friend; my extravagance has beggared my boy; my

Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

unkindness has murdered my wife ! And is there another hell ? O thou blasphemed yet most indulgent Lord God ! hell itself is a refuge, if it hide me from thy frown."

Soon after, his understanding failed ; his terrified imagination uttered horrors not to be repeated, or ever forgotten : and before the sun (which I hope has seen few like him) arose, this gay, young, noble, ingenuous, accomplished, and most wretched mortal, expired.

It must, indeed, be owned it sometimes happens that men who have led very wicked lives have gone out of the world as they have lived in it, defying conscience, and deriding a future judgment as an idle fiction ; but these instances are very rare, and only prove that there are monsters in the moral as well as the natural world.

It will perhaps be said, that the sons of vice and riot have pleasure in sensual indulgences. Allowed ; but it is altogether of the lower kind, empty, fleeting, and transient : "like the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the mirth of the wicked." It makes a noise and a blaze for the

present, but soon vanishes away into smoke and vapour.

On the other hand, the pleasure of religion is solid and lasting ; and will attend us through all, even the last stages of life. When we have passed the levity of youth, and have lost our relish for the gay entertainments of sense ; when old age steals upon us, and stoops us towards the grave ; this will cleave fast to us, and give us relief. It will be so far from terminating at death, that it then commences perfect, and continually improves, with new additions.

Clad in this immortal robe, we need not fear the awful summons of the king of terrors, nor regret our retiring into the chambers of the dust. Our immortal part will wing its way to the arms of its omnipotent Redeemer, and find rest in the heavenly mansions of the Almighty. And though our earthly part, this tabernacle of clay, returns to its original dust, and is dissolved, our joy, our consolation, our confidence, is, that "we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

The Lives

OF THE

APOSTLES AND EVANGELISTS.

SAINT PETER.

CHAPTER I.

Account of the Life of St. Peter prior to his call to the Apostleship of the blessed Jesus.

ST. Peter was born at Bethsaida, a city of Galilee, situate on the banks of the lake of Gennesaret, called also the sea of Galilee, from its being situated in that country; and the lake of Tiberias, from that city being built on its banks. The particular time of this great apostle's birth cannot be known; the evangelists, and other writers among the primitive Christians, having been silent with regard to this matter. It is, however, presumed that he was at least ten years older than his Master; the circumstances of his being married, and in a settled

course of life, when he first became a follower of the great Messiah, and that authority and respect the gravity of his person procured him among the rest of the apostles, are thought sufficiently to declare this conjecture to be just.

As he was a descendant of Abraham, he was circumcised according to the rites of the Mosaic law, and called by his parents Simon or Simeon, a name common at that time among the Jews. But after his becoming a disciple of the blessed Jesus, the additional title of Cephas was conferred upon him by his Master, to denote the firmness of his faith; the word Cephas, in the Syriac, the common language of the Jews at that time, signifying a stone or Rock.

Lives of the Apostles and Evangelists.

With regard to the parents of St. Peter, the evangelists have also been silent, except in telling us that his father's name was Jonas, who was highly honoured by our blessed Saviour, who chose two of his sons, Andrew and Peter, to be his apostles, and preachers of the glad tidings of salvation to the children of men.

St. Peter in his youth was brought up to the trade of fishing, on the lake of Bethsaida, famous for different kinds of fish which excelled all others in the fineness of their taste.

Here he followed the trade of fishing, but afterwards removed to Capernaum, where he settled; for we find he had a house there when our Saviour began his public ministry, and there he paid tribute.—Nicephorus tells us, that Helen, the mother of Constantine, erected a beautiful church over the ruins of St. Peter's house, in honour of that apostle.

Capernaum was as well situated as Bethsaida for carrying on his trade, standing at the influx of the Jordan into the sea of Galilee, and where he might with equal advantage reap the fruits of an honest and industrious diligence. The business of Peter was both mean and toilsome; it exposed him to all the injuries of the weather, the tempestuousness of the sea, and the

darkness and horror of the night, and all to acquire a mean livelihood for himself and family. But meanness of worldly degree is no obstacle to the favour of God; nay, if we review the state of Christianity, from its rise to the present period, we shall find that its friends and votaries consist rather of persons of humble and lowly stations in life, than of the great, the dignified, and the opulent.

And herein are manifested the wise and admirable methods used by divine Providence, in making choice of such mean and unlikely instruments in planting and propagating the Christian religion in the world. Men who were destitute of the advantages of education, and brought up to the meanest employments, were chosen to confound the wise, and overturn the learning of the great. Such were the persons whom the Almighty sent to propagate the religion of his Son; to silence the wise, the scribe, and the disputer of this world, and to make foolish the wisdom of the earth. For though the Jews required a sign, and the Greeks sought after wisdom; though the preaching of a crucified Saviour made no impression on the former, and wisdom became of little avail to the latter; yet by this preaching God was pleased to save them that believed,

Times of the Apostles and Evangelists.

and in the event made it appear, that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." That so the honour of all might redound to himself, "that no flesh should glory in his presence, but that he that glorieth should glory in the Lord."

CHAPTER II.

The manner by which Peter arrived at the Knowledge of the blessed Jesus, and of his Call to the Discipleship.

SACRED history has not ascertained of what sect the apostle was. We know indeed that his brother Andrew was a follower of John the Baptist, that preacher of repentance; and it is very unlikely that he, who was ready to carry his brother the early tidings of the Messiah, that the "Sun of righteousness" was already risen in those parts, should not be equally solicitous to bring him under the discipline and influence of John the Baptist, the day-star which appeared to usher in the glorious advent of the Son of God. Besides, Peter's great readiness and curiosity, at the first news of Christ's appearing, to come to him and converse with him, shows that his expectation had been awakened, and some glimmering

rays of hope conveyed to him by the preaching and ministry of John, who was "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

He became acquainted with the immaculate Lamb of God in the following manner: The blessed Jesus having spent thirty years in the solitude of a private life, had lately been baptized by John in Jordan, and there owned by the solemn attestation of Heaven to be the Son of God; whereupon he was immediately led into the wilderness, and there for forty days maintained a powerful contest with the devil. But having conquered this great enemy of mankind, he returned to "the place beyond Jordan," where John was baptizing his disciples, and endeavouring to answer the Jews, who had sent a deputation to him to inquire concerning this new Messiah that appeared among them. To satisfy these curious inquirers of Israel, John faithfully related everything he knew concerning him, gave him the greatest character, and soon after pointed him out to his disciples: upon which two of them presently followed the great Redeemer of mankind, one of whom was Andrew, Simon's brother.

Nor did he conceal the joyful discovery he had made; for early in

Lives of the Apostles and Evangelists.

the morning he hastened to acquaint his brother Simon that he had found the Messiah. It is not enough to be happy alone; grace is a communicative principle, that, like circles in the water, delights to multiply itself, and to diffuse its influences all around, especially on those whom nature has placed nearest to us. I have, said he, with rapture to his brother, found that eminent person so long and signally foretold by the prophets, and whom all the devout and pious among the sons of Jacob so earnestly expected.

Simon, who was one of those who waited for the redemption of Israel, ravished with the joyful news, and impatient of delay, presently followed his brother to the place: and on his arrival our blessed Saviour immediately gave him a proof of his divinity; saluting him at first sight by his name, and telling him both who he was, his name and kindred, and what title should soon be conferred upon him.

But whether these two sons of Jonas constantly attended in person from that time on the great Redeemer of mankind, and became his disciples, the sacred history is silent. It is, however, probable that they stayed with him some time, till they were instructed in the first rudiments of his doctrines; and then, by the leave of their great and benevolent

Master, returned to their families, and to their callings: for it is reasonable to suppose that the blessed Jesus was not at this time willing to awaken the jealousy of the rulers of Israel, and the suspicion of the Romans, by a numerous retinue; and therefore dismissed his disciples, and among the rest Andrew and Peter, who returned to their trade of fishing on the lake, and where our blessed Redeemer afterwards found them. But some think that they continued with Christ from the time that they were first called to be his disciples, as hearers of all the doctrines which he preached, and witnesses of all his miracles.

The holy Jesus had now more than a year entered on his public ministry, going into every part of the country, to seek opportunities of doing good to the children of men; so that by the constancy of his preaching, and the reputation of his miracles, his fame was spread throughout all Judea; and multitudes of people flocked to him from all parts, to hear his doctrines, and be spectators of his mighty works.

But, to avoid this prodigious throng of people, our great Redeemer often retired to some solitary place, to indulge the privacies of contemplation. In one of these retreats, on the banks of the sea of Galilee, the multitude found him out, and ran to

Lives of the Apostles and Evangelists.

him from the city. Our Saviour, therefore, to avoid the crowd, stepped into a fishing-boat which lay near shore, and belonged to Simon Peter, who, together with his companions, were on shore drying their nets, after an unsuccessful night spent in toil and labour. The blessed Jesus, who might have commanded, was pleased to entreat Peter, who now returned to his boat, to thrust off a little from the land, that he might instruct the people, who were gathering in prodigious crowds on the borders of the lake.

Peter gladly complied with the request of his Master, who delivered his heavenly doctrine to the people on the shore. As soon as he had ended his discourse, he resolved to seal it by a miracle, that the people might be persuaded he was a "teacher come from God." Accordingly, he ordered Simon to row farther from the shore, and cast his net into the sea. To which Simon answered, that they had laboured the preceding night, and had taken nothing; and if they could not then succeed, there were little hopes of it now, as the day was far less proper for fishing than the night. But as his Master was pleased to command, he would obey; and accordingly he let down his net, when, to the astonishment both of him and his companions, so great a multitude of fishes

were enclosed, that they were obliged to call their partners to their assistance. Amazed at this miraculous draught of fishes, Simon Peter, in an ecstasy of admiration, blended with awe and humility, fell prostrate at his Master's feet, acknowledging himself a vile and sinful person, and thinking himself unworthy of being admitted into the presence of a person so immediately sent from God. But the compassionate Son of the Most High kindly removed his fears; telling him, that this miracle was wrought to confirm his faith, and indicate to him that the Almighty had appointed a more noble employment for him, that of saving the souls of the children of men.

From this time Peter and his companions became the inseparable and constant disciples of the great Messiah, living under the rules of his discipline and instructions. Soon after, our blessed Saviour returned to Capernaum with his disciples, where they found the mother-in-law of Peter dangerously ill of a fever. But the compassionate Jesus, who never omitted any opportunity of doing good to the human race, rebuked the disease, and, taking her by the hand, restored her in a moment to her former health; demonstrating at once his power and willingness to relieve the sons and daughters of affliction.

